

CURRENT TRENDS IN THE ORIGINS OF THE STATE DISCUSSION

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This article examines contemporary trends in the study of state origins, focusing on theoretical developments since the seminal works of the 1970s. It analyzes the evolution of key concepts, including the “early state” model (Claessen, Skalník 1978), and its critical reception across global scholarly traditions, with particular attention to its significant influence in Russian historiography. The article explores the enduring debate between functionalist/integrative and conflict theories of state formation, arguing for a synthetic approach that acknowledges the state’s dual nature as both an organ of control and a mechanism for social integration. It further investigates the complex, non-deterministic relationship between urbanization (the “Urban Revolution”) and politogenesis, highlighting evidence of multilinear social evolution where hierarchical states coexisted with non-hierarchical complex societies. The analysis concludes that future progress in understanding state origins lies in interdisciplinary approaches, leveraging archaeological data, comparative analysis, and modeling within a framework that recognizes the multivariate and asynchronous nature of politogenesis.

Keywords: early state, politogenesis, social evolution, urbanization, urban revolution, multilinearity, chiefdom, heterarchy, theoretical archaeology.

INTRODUCTION

The mid-1970s represent a significant theoretical milestone in the global scholarship on state formation. This period witnessed the publication of several foundational works that would profoundly shape the field, most notably Elman Service’s *Origins of the State and Civilization* (1975) and the seminal collective volume *The Early State*, edited by Henri J.M. Claessen and Petr Skalník (1978). While this chronological marker is necessarily somewhat arbitrary, it underscores a critical juncture of theoretical consolidation. Earlier seminal contributions, such as Morton Fried’s *The Evolution of Political Society* (1967) and Robert Carneiro’s highly

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influential article *A Theory of the Origin of the State* (1970), had already laid crucial groundwork. In terms of its enduring impact, this cluster of 1970s scholarship is arguably rivaled only by V. Gordon Childe's earlier paradigm of the *Urban Revolution* (1950), which established a prior conceptual benchmark for analyzing the emergence of social complexity.

It is noteworthy that *The Early State* represents a foundational collaborative volume authored by twenty-two scholars from seven countries. Particularly significant was the contribution of seven researchers from the Soviet Union, including A.Ya. Gurevich, G.V. Karanashvili, A.M. Khazanov, Yu.M. Kobishchanov, N.B. Kochakova, S.A. Maretina, and L.A. Sedov. The volume's structure comprises three principal sections: theoretical and synthesizing chapters by H.J.M. Claessen, P. Skalník, R. Cohen, L. Krader, and A.M. Khazanov; detailed case studies of twenty-one early states; and a comprehensive concluding analysis by Claessen and Skalník. This final sections provided a systematic, structuralist examination of the "differences and similarities" across the presented cases, synthesizing the data into nineteen detailed tables and facilitating a critical discussion and verification of the work's initial theoretical framework.

The publication of these seminal works catalyzed a sustained research program in early state studies, resulting in a series of influential volumes that systematically developed the initial theoretical framework. The volume *The Study of the State* (Claessen, Skalník 1981) further refined the editorial concept of the early state. Subsequently, *The Early State in African Perspective*, produced by Claessen's colleagues, was dedicated to rigorously testing the theory against specific ethnohistorical data (Eisenstadt et al. 1988). The analytical focus then shifted to the evolutionary trajectories of early states with the collection *Development and Decline* (Claessen, van de Velde, Smith 1985), which situated them within broader patterns of sociopolitical transformation. This research program continued through several thematic volumes: *The Dynamics of the Early State* (Claessen, van de Velde 1987), *The Economy of the Early State* (Claessen, van de Velde 1991), and *Ideology and the Formation of Early States* (Claessen, Oosten 1996), each examining distinct institutional dimensions of early state formation.

The reception of the early state concept has been uneven across different scholarly traditions. While it has been integrated into European scholarship to varying degrees, its impact on American anthropology has remained comparatively limited (Skalník 2009, 2012). In contrast, its influence on Russian historiography and anthropology has been profoundly more substantial. As previously noted (Kradin 2006), this can be partially explained by the concept's intellectual debt to A.I. Neusykhin's theory of *pre-feudal society*, which subsequently informed the doctoral work and publications of Petr Skalník. Russian-speaking academia was first introduced to the core tenets of early state theory — alongside Elman Service's principal ideas on state origins — in the early 1980s through two seminal review articles by L.S. Vasil'ev (1980, 1981). Within a few

years, the framework was operationalized in studies of ancient Chinese (Vasil'ev 1983) and African (Kochakova 1986) state formation.

It is critical to contextualize this reception within concurrent theoretical developments in Soviet scholarship. This period coincided with the third major discussion on the Asiatic mode of production in the USSR (Vasil'ev 1983 etc.) and the concurrent crystallization of the “potestarian-political” (*potestarno-politicheskoe*) direction in ethnology and anthropology. This school of thought, which focused on power structures in pre-state and early state societies, is exemplified by key works from this era (Pershits 1979; Khazanov 1979; Pershits, Treide 1986; Kubbel' 1988; Popov 1990; Semenov 1993), creating a fertile intellectual ground for the adoption of the early state model.

The subsequent generation of scholars — “children of perestroika”, actively engaged with theoretical debates concerning state formation. An early avant-garde contribution was the collection *Archaic Society* (Korotayev, Chubarov 1991), which promptly garnered scholarly attention (Bondarenko 1993; Semenov 1993a). This was followed by a prolific “alternative” series of publications (Kradin, Lynsha 1995; Kradin et al. 2000; Bondarenko, Korotayev 2002; Grinin et al. 2004 etc.), notable for the parallel issuance of works in both Russian and English. Concurrently, the publication of the “Early Forms” series, edited by V.A. Popov, commenced; this series now comprises six volumes to date.

A development of significant international import was the establishment of the English-language journal *Social Evolution & History* in 2002, under the editorship of D.M. Bondarenko, L.E. Grinin, and A.V. Korotayev. The journal has become a central forum for debating a wide spectrum of issues in macrohistory, social evolution, and political anthropology. Illustrating its scope, recent years have featured special issues dedicated to the theory of the early state (2008, No 1), the anthropology of the state (2009, No 1), social evolution (2009, No 2), the origin of the state in Europe (2010, No 2), chiefdom theory (2011, No 1), R. Carneiro's circumscription theory (2012, No 2), nomadic societies (2019, No 2), and a memorial issue honoring H.J.M. Claessen (2023, No 2), etc.

Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge the significance of the unprecedented international scholarly forum, “Hierarchy and Power in the History of Civilizations”, which was active from 2000 to 2009. This series of five conferences successfully convened specialists in political anthropology and scholars of politogenesis, fostering a unique platform for interdisciplinary dialogue.

Over the subsequent nearly three post-Marxist decades, Russian scholarship has produced a substantial body of work on politogenesis theory. This includes numerous individual monographs exploring its various facets (e.g., Kradin 2004, 2021; Bondarenko 2006; Grinin 2007, 2011; Grinin, Korotayev 2009; Berezkin 2013) as well as influential collective volumes (e.g., Grinin et al. 2006; Kradin 2012; Grinin 2019).

Concurrently, international scholarship has also seen a prolific output of theoretical works on state origins (e.g., Earle 1997, 2002; Feinman, Marcus 1998; Smith A. 2003; Maisels 2010; Price, Feinman 2010; Lull, Micó 2011; Smith M. 2011; Routledge 2014; Sabloff J., Sabloff P. 2018; Bondarenko et al. 2020). Given the considerable volume of publications, this analysis is necessarily limited to some of the most influential contributions from the past two decades.

Foremost among these publications are critical studies directed against neoevolutionist paradigms. A seminal work in this regard is Norman Yoffee's *Myths of the Archaic State* (2005). One of Yoffee's most compelling arguments posits that while early states are often conceptualized as highly adaptive and stable systems, the historical and archaeological record reveals their inherent fragility, as they were frequently susceptible to crises and collapse under various internal and external pressures (a thesis he further develops in Yoffee 2019). Yoffee maintains a particularly critical stance toward the use of ethnographic parallels in studies of politogenesis. He contends that neoevolutionist schemas do not primarily derive from archaeological evidence but instead represent "a theory of ethnographic types projected into the past". From his perspective, the earliest form of statehood was the city-state — a political formation conspicuously absent from the catalog of known ethnographic types (Yoffee 2005: 5–7, 23, 180–181).

Bruce Trigger, in his significant comparative analysis of early pristine states, arrived at conclusions that diverge in key aspects from those of Norman Yoffee. Trigger proposed a fundamental typological distinction, identifying both *city-states* and *territorial states* among the earliest state formations. According to his framework, city-states — exemplified by those in Mesopotamia, Greece, and Mesoamerica — were characterized by populations of farmers, artisans, and traders, with economies marked by a significant degree of commercialization and market development. In contrast, territorial states — such as those in Egypt, China, and the Inca Empire — featured cities that functioned primarily as political and administrative centers, extracting tribute or taxes from their surrounding rural hinterlands. This mode of surplus extraction, Trigger argued, necessitated and fostered the development of multi-level bureaucratic hierarchies (2003).

Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus have contributed a significant volume that systematically traces the trajectory of increasing social inequality and the evolution of political institutions into states and empires. Their work is structured as a comprehensive synthesis, juxtaposing ethnographic case studies of societies across the spectrum of complexity with detailed overviews of archaeological excavations from both the Old and New Worlds (Flannery, Marcus 2012).

Simultaneously, perspectives from anarchist anthropology have gained considerable traction. A prominent example is James C. Scott's influential

work, *Against the Grain* (2017), which posits that the cultivation of cereal grains functioned as a form of “edible money”, thereby furnishing incipient bureaucracies with a crucial mechanism for social control and the consolidation of power. The book’s impact is evidenced by the dedicated forum in the *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* (2019, No 4) and its significant public reception. Another seminal contribution is the extensive volume *The Dawn of Everything* by David Graeber and David Wengrow (2021), which offers a sweeping re-examination of prehistoric social formations. Employing the state as a primary focus of their critique, the authors advance the thesis that complex forms of human social organization could emerge and persist without relying on centralized bureaucracy or systemic violence.

This article will summarize contemporary ideas about the state origins, and also examine some results of the study of the role of urbanization in the processes of formation of complex societies.

CURRENT TRENDS IN STATE ORIGINS

As established in contemporary scholarship, the most ancient archaic, or early, states emerged across diverse ecological settings. These included arid zones dependent on river irrigation (Mesopotamia, Egypt), river valleys within tropical forests (India), loess river valleys (China), and highland jungles (Mesoamerica, the Andes). A wide array of factors has been proposed to explain the genesis of statehood, encompassing favorable ecological conditions, the development of a productive economic base, population pressure and ensuing internal conflict, technological innovations, cultural diffusion, warfare and conquest, external threats, long-distance trade networks, and the role of ideology (Carneiro 1970; Renfrew 1972; Service 1975; Haas 1982; Pavlenko 1989; Korotayev 1991; Claessen 2000; Turchin 2003, 2016, 2025 etc.).

However, as Jonathan Haas astutely observed, many theoretical models offer compelling explanations primarily for the specific cases from which they were derived, effectively serving as illustrations of their own premises (Haas 1982: 130). Consequently, none of the factors listed above can be considered universally determinant. The prevailing consensus in current research acknowledges that the process of politogenesis was inherently complex and multivariate, contingent upon a confluence of numerous and interdependent variables (Peregrine et al. 2007: 84).

Prolonged scholarly debate has crystallized two principal, opposing theoretical approaches to the phenomenon of the state. Proponents of the first approach, with roots in conservative and liberal political thought, conceptualize the state as an institution for managing social order and resolving collective action problems. This perspective emphasizes the state’s positive and constructive functions, framing it as an essential

organizer of society and a mechanism for mediating contradictions and achieving public goods. Within anthropological theory, this is conventionally termed the functionalist (or adaptationist/integrative) approach, most consistently articulated in the works of Elman Service (1962; 1975).

Adherents of the second approach conceptualize the state fundamentally as an instrument of control and domination. This perspective characterizes the state in predominantly negative terms, viewing it as an institution of systemic violence and, typically, a mechanism for the oppression of the majority by a ruling minority. Normative conclusions derived from this analysis range from its outright abolition, as advocated by anarchists, to its radical transformation, as proposed by Marxists. This framework is identified as the conflict (or Marxist) approach. In anthropology, it finds its most explicit formulation in the work of Morton Fried (1967), although its intellectual lineage is clearly traceable to Marxist theory.

From a historiographical perspective, it is noteworthy that both Elman Service and Morton Fried were influenced by Trotskyist ideas in their youth — a detail of particular interest given Leon Trotsky's residence in neighboring Mexico during that period. This shared intellectual background underscores the complex relationship between personal political leanings and theoretical development in anthropology.

A significant critique of the functionalist approach concerns its tendency to overstate the positive contributions of ruling elites to social stability and development. In emphasizing the integrative functions of the state, functionalist scholars risk compromising their analytical objectivity, effectively aligning with liberal ideological premises. Historical evidence, however, provides ample counterexamples of incompetent or even destructive governance, where the actions of rulers and state institutions precipitated collapse or revolution. The frequent failure of early states to maintain their integrity, as documented by scholars such as Tainter (1988) and Yoffee (2019), further challenges the functionalist emphasis on inherent stability.

Furthermore, while conflict theory provides a necessary corrective to functionalist optimism, it would be reductive to interpret social conflicts exclusively through the lens of Marxist class struggle. Social antagonisms frequently manifest along ethnic, religious, regional, or status-based lines, demonstrating that structural conflict is not inherently class-based in nature.

According to the conflict theory framework advanced by Ralf Dahrendorf (1957), the fundamental source of social conflict resides not merely in individuals' membership within specific social groups, including economic classes, but rather in the differential distribution of authority. Conflict arises from the inherent antagonism between those groups that wield institutionalized power and those that are systematically excluded from it. Social antagonisms serve not only to divide but also to integrate. Conflict can establish boundaries between groups, reinforce collective identities,

and foster internal solidarity. In this capacity, protracted conflict may generate a new systemic quality within the social structure, ultimately giving rise to novel social formations and institutions that did not previously exist (Coser 1956).

It is noteworthy that, despite the high citation counts of Fried and Service, few contemporary scholars align themselves decisively with either pole of the functionalist-conflict debate. The majority of scholars prefer an intermediate position. This synthesis is aptly captured by Pierre Bourdieu's metaphor of the state possessing "two hands" — one wielding a punishing sword and the other dispensing benefits to society (1993). This duality underscores the limitations of a rigid theoretical dichotomy. Michael Mann argued that the debate between integrative and conflict theories often becomes scholastic, as most social relations embody a dialectical intertwining of power's facets: the functional, collective, and integrating, alongside the exploitative and redistributive (1986: 6, 76).

The paradigm shift at the close of the twentieth century further encouraged this synthetic view, fostering skepticism toward the universalist claims of both Marxist and neoevolutionist frameworks. As Goran Hyden noted, this period saw the rise of relativist theories, which emphasize regional specificity and postmodern discourse, challenging the grand narratives of Marxism, evolutionism, and modernization theory (1996).

A conventional typology within the study of early or archaic states distinguishes between pristine and secondary states. Pristine states are those that emerged autonomously, through processes of internal socio-political evolution and without the formative influence of pre-existing states. The scholarly identifies six core pristine states: Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Indus Valley (India), China, Mesoamerica, and the Inca Empire in the Andes. The formation of these primary states spanned a prolonged period from approximately 3500 to 1500 BCE. Some also propose the inclusion of certain polities in Tropical Africa within this category. As the origins of pristine states have been extensively examined in the existing literature, they will not be the focus of the present analysis.

In contrast, secondary states developed under the direct or indirect influence of already established state centers, a critical factor that must inform any study of their politogenesis. The expansion of statehood through secondary formation is marked by several significant historical accelerations. Rein Taagapera (1997: 475, 480) identifies three major theoretical leaps in state expansion occurring around 300 BCE, 600 CE, and 1600 CE. Each of these thresholds is intrinsically linked to global world-system processes. The first leap, around 300 BCE, corresponds with the onset of the Afro-Eurasian "Classical Antiquity" and the establishment of the first transcontinental Eurasian communication network — the Silk Road, connecting the Roman and Han Chinese empires. The second leap, circa 600 CE, heralds the beginning of the Middle Ages and a reconfiguration of interregional connections. Finally, the third leap, around 1600 CE,

marks the advent of the Modern Era and the rise of the capitalist world-system, which fundamentally reshaped global patterns of integration and governance.

Most scholars, irrespective of their specific terminological preferences, generally concur that the trajectory toward the modern state — a form consolidated within industrial society — can be delineated into three major developmental stages:

- (1) The *pre-state* society stage, characterized by the exclusion of the general populace from key decision-making processes. This phase is conceptualized in various theoretical frameworks as *pre-feudal society*, *pre-class society*, *chiefdom*, or systems of *state analogues*.
- (2) The *early state* stage, marked by the emergence of an incipient, yet not fully institutionalized, power apparatus and the absence of developed private property. This stage is alternatively termed *early class society*, *archaic*, *barbarian*, *early feudal*, or *estate state* in different scholarly traditions.
- (3) The *mature pre-industrial state* stage, distinguished by the establishment of a formal bureaucracy and the consolidation of private property. This form is variously referenced as the *traditional*, *mature*, *agrarian*, or *developed* state, corresponding to *estate-class society* (Gurevich 1970; Claessen, Skalník 1978, 1981; Vasil'ev 1983; Gellner 1988; Kubbel 1988; Pavlenko 1989; Ilyushechkin 1990; Johnson, Earle 2000; Grinin 2007, 2009, 2019 etc.).

Furthermore, analysis based on large-scale historical data, such as that from the SESHAT Databank, suggests a demographic threshold for statehood, typically crossed when a polity's population surpasses approximately 100,000 individuals (Turchin et al. 2018). A significant exception to this pattern, however, is found in the steppe empires of Inner Asia. These polities demonstrate a capacity to unite vast populations under a centralized authority without developing the extensive, sedentary bureaucratic apparatus characteristic of agrarian states.

These nomadic formations are best understood as semi-peripheral societies, whose political structures were dynamically interrelated with neighboring agrarian civilizations. A core dependency is observed: the degree of political centralization within the steppe polity was often a function of the level of centralization in the adjacent sedentary society. Tribal confederations and chiefdoms typically emerged in interaction with oasis-states, whereas more integrated nomadic empires arose contemporaneously with large, centralized agrarian empires. The power of steppe rulers was fundamentally predicated on a redistributive political economy. Their authority was consolidated and maintained through the leadership of military raids and the subsequent redistribution of extracted resources — including plunder and tribute—among their followers. This mode of political integration, distinct from bureaucratic taxation and administration,

could also involve the forced relocation of skilled sedentary populations to bolster the empire's economic and technical capacities (Khazanov 1984; Barfield 1992; Golden 2003; Kradin et al. 2003; Kradin 2014, 2020; Bazarov, Kradin 2019 etc.).

In sedentary agricultural societies the emergence of hierarchical polities such as chiefdoms and states represents only one trajectory of socio-political evolution. A parallel, significant vector is the development of non-hierarchical societies. Anthropological theory commonly conceptualizes this dichotomy as two opposing strategic patterns: the *hierarchical* (or *network*) model and the *heterarchical* (or *corporate*) model. These strategies represent polar extremes on a spectrum of social complexity. At one end lie classical chiefdoms and states of varying complexity, characterized by centralized and institutionalized authority. At the other end exist complex societies that maintain integration without a rigid, clearly defined vertical power structure. Crucially, between these two poles lies a vast field of intermediate variations, encompassing diverse combinations of economic systems, political institutions, and ideological forms (Berezkin 1995, 2000; Crumley 1995, 2001; Korotayev 1995; Blanton et al. 1996; Kristiansen 1998; Bondarenko, Korotayev 2000; Kradin et al. 2000; Haas 2001; Feinman 2001; Grinin et al. 2004; Bondarenko 2006; Chapman 2008; Earle, Kristiansen 2010; Price, Feinman 2010; Chacon, Mendoza 2017; Bondarenko, Aleksandrova 2024 etc.).

These findings provide compelling evidence for conceptualizing social evolution as a fundamentally multilinear process. Further supporting this perspective is the scholarly position that polis organizations in Ancient Greece (Berent 2000) and Rome (Shtaerman 1989) should not be classified as states in the strict sense, given their lack of a developed bureaucratic apparatus. The emergence of bureaucratic organization across various states worldwide constituted a protracted historical development.

According to Taagapera's statistical analysis, significant institutional shifts associated with the formation of bureaucratic structures occurred approximately between 650 and 600 BCE (1997: 486). This period appears correlated with the onset of the Axial Age and the subsequent rise of classical empires. Nevertheless, historiography documents that a distinct social stratum of literate administrators had already crystallized in Ancient Egypt much earlier, during the Old Kingdom period, long before the Axial Age. This is evidenced by known panegyrics of Egyptian scribes to the younger generation, which meticulously describe the privileges of their station—including smooth skin, clean garments, dust-free labor, and social honor—thereby indicating the early formation of a managerial class (Korostovtsev 1962).

Scholars who advocate for the classification of poleis as city-states generally acknowledge that territorial states necessarily possessed a developed hierarchical administrative organization. They contend, however, that the polis represented a distinct form of statehood—a heterarchical

type that differed fundamentally from the hierarchical early state model (Van der Vliet 2005). This perspective finds further support in the historical context of medieval Europe, where many kingdoms failed to develop a substantial bureaucratic apparatus. This observation has led several prominent historians to argue that genuine statehood in this region emerged only at the transition from the late Middle Ages to the early modern period (see, e.g., Strayer 1970; Davies 2003; Reynolds 2003). This thesis is succinctly captured in Fernand Braudel's classic maxim: "The founding fathers of the modern state were the 'Three Wise Men' as Francis Bacon called them — Henry VII of England, Louis XI of France, and Ferdinand of Aragon" (1983: 514).

NOTES ON THE "URBAN REVOLUTION" 75 YEARS LATER

The emergence of cities represents one of the most transformative developments in human history. As Lewis Mumford eloquently observed, "The origins of the city are obscure, a large part of its past buried or effaced beyond recovery, and its further prospects are difficult to weigh" (1961: 3). This profound transition is intrinsically linked to the formation of statehood, a thesis classically formulated by V. Gordon Childe in his seminal concept of the "Urban Revolution". Childe's 1950 article, arguably the most cited publication in archaeological literature, established ten diagnostic criteria for identifying complex societies at the state level. These include: the emergence of significant urban centers; specialized occupational classes engaged in non-subsistence activities (artisans, merchants, priests, officials) concentrated in cities; systematic extraction of a substantial surplus product by an elite; construction of monumental religious, palatial, and public architecture; emergence of distinct ruling strata and pronounced social stratification visible in the archaeological record; development of writing systems and rudimentary mathematics; advancement of sophisticated artistic traditions; establishment of long-distance trade networks; formation of state-level political organization; implementation of systematic taxation or tribute collection (Childe 1950).

Although Childe's seminal article foregrounded the transformative role of cities in early complex societies, his conceptual framework addressed the broader phenomenon of state formation and the emergence of social stratification (Smith A. 2003: 187). Despite this wider scope, the "Urban Revolution" model and its diagnostic criteria have profoundly influenced all subsequent scholarly discourse on state origins (Smith M. 2009: 22).

Childe's original checklist of traits has undergone substantial refinement and critical revision in subsequent decades. Numerous influential studies have proposed expanded and modified sets of characteristics defining early civilizations (Adams 1966; Renfrew 1972; Haas 1982;

Feinman, Marcus 1998; Maisels 1999; Smith A. 2003; Flannery, Marcus 2012; Smith M. 2023). Among these diverse criteria, the city consistently emerges as a foundational element. Consequently, for the overwhelming majority of scholars, the city represents the material embodiment and archaeological signature of statehood (Fox 1977: 24).

However, it is obvious that urbanism is much more than just an appendage to the concept of the state (Cowgill 2004: 526). The nature of the relationship between urbanization and the dynamics of political genesis has been the subject of study by many researchers (Adams 1966; Blanton 1982; Algaze 2008; Marcus, Sabloff 2008; Smith M. 2023). By now, countless books and articles have been written discussing the problematic of the origin and early stages of urbanization (see, for example: Ucko et al. 1970; Nichols, Charlton 1997; Hansen 2000; Cowgill 2004; Marcus, Sabloff 2008; Smith M. 2023 etc.).

The definition of what constitutes a city remains a subject of enduring and multifaceted debate among specialists across disciplines, from architecture to archaeology. Even foundational urban theorists demonstrate significant divergence in their conceptualizations. Louis Wirth, for instance, defined a city through quantitative and structural characteristics: a large, dense, permanent settlement with a heterogeneous population and functional specialization (Wirth 1938: 8). In contrast, Lewis Mumford offered a more figurative interpretation, describing the city as a “theater of social action”, where spatial concentration fosters the intensification of economic and institutional processes and gives form to collective cultural expression (Mumford 1937). A more contemporary and concise formulation comes from Edward Glaeser, who characterizes the city by its core attributes of proximity, density, and connection (2011: 6).

However, the applicability of these definitions, particularly those emphasizing large size, high density, and social heterogeneity, to the earliest urban centers remains a subject of scholarly inquiry. For archaeological identification, researchers often rely on a constellation of material correlates. These typically include the presence of fortifications, defined settlement boundaries, evidence of axial planning, monumental architecture (such as temples and palaces), specialized craft production zones, distinct cemeteries, and designated public spaces for assembly or ritual (Renfrew 2008).

As Cowgill observes, existing urban definitions can be synthesized into two primary approaches: demographic and functional (2004: 526). The demographic approach characterizes a city fundamentally as a settlement with a high population density (Stoddart 1999: 909). Such definitions are widely employed in contemporary research due to their operational utility, particularly for geographers who can leverage statistical data and census records, requiring only a consensus on a minimum population threshold (Wheatley 1972: 620–621). This quantitative perspective has also been adopted within archaeology, where a population of 5,000 inhabitants

is frequently cited as a conventional benchmark for identifying urban settlements (Masson 1976: 141; Stoddart 1999: 911; Storey 2006: 22).

Nevertheless, the demographic approach presents several significant limitations. The size and density of a settlement's population do not consistently correlate with the specific functions it performs. For instance, the population density of pre-Columbian Mesoamerican cities was substantially lower than that of modern urban centers, often failing to meet conventional demographic thresholds for urban status (Smith M. 2008). Similarly, Ian Hodder characterizes the renowned Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük not as a city but as "simply a very large village", despite its estimated population of up to 8,000 inhabitants (Hodder 2006: 98).

From this perspective, the functional approach would seem preferable to the demographic one. One must agree with B. Trigger that the city performed specific, specialized tasks in relation to the surrounding territories and thus differed from non-urban settlements (Trigger 2003: 120). However, this approach also presents a number of challenges. The most prevalent viewpoint defines the city as a trade and craft center. This conception originates from classical urban theories of the early 20th century, traceable to Max Weber, which took the development of the Western European city as their model. A stable understanding of the city gradually crystallized as an economic center that concentrates human capital and resources, thereby facilitating the concentration of industry (i.e., non-agricultural functions) and the redistribution of goods (Jacobs 1969).

An alternative perspective positions the city primarily as a center for elite residence and administrative functions, materially manifested in monumental architecture (Sjoberg 1960). The development of this latter view was significantly advanced by archaeologists specializing in the genesis and development of early urban centers. Robert McC. Adams, for instance, emphasized the city as a locus for central institutions and a hub for resource exchange (1966).

A parallel debate unfolded among Russian historians and archaeologists. Initially, scholarly emphasis rested on the trade and craft functions of the city (Tikhomirov 1946: 8–9; Sakharov 1959: 17). Later scholarship, however, gravitated toward a more nuanced interpretation, viewing the city as a phenomenon that combined economic and administrative-political functions (Karlov 1980; Kuza 1983).

In any case, the city's dual functions — as a nexus for trade and exchange, and as a center of power for the collection of surplus products from the periphery — represent two fundamental, complementary aspects of urban life, rather than functional alternatives (Brumfiel 1991). Essentially, the city is a settlement that performs specialized functions atypical of the communities where the majority of the population resides. Given that in pre-industrial societies the bulk of the population was engaged in agriculture (Gellner 1988), this specialization primarily entails non-agrarian functions. An important qualification is necessary here: the populations

of many ancient cities, such as those in classical societies, often engaged in agriculture, and in the context of nomadic empires, the relevant distinction is the performance of non-pastoral functions.

It is important to note that the thesis of synchronicity between urbanization and politogenesis is not universally accepted. David Wengrow (2015), for instance, published a dedicated study arguing for the non-state nature of the urban centers in archaic India during the 3rd millennium BCE, building upon Gregory Possehl's earlier work (Possehl 1998). These ideas were further elaborated in the volume *The Dawn of Everything*, which added the Trypillia culture of the Danube-Dnieper interfluvium as another example of early urbanism without state structures (Graeber, Wengrow 2021).

Monica Smith similarly concurs with Possehl's conclusion that there is no direct logical connection between population density and the emergence of centralized governance (Smith Mo. 2003: 12). Other cited examples include pre-Islamic Mecca, which is interpreted as an urban society lacking state organization (Wolf 1951).

Recently, Justin Jennings and Timothy Earle (2016) have directly challenged the model of synchronous state origin and urbanization. They present two primary cases that contradict this paradigm. The urban center of Tiwanaku in the Andes (modern Bolivia), where their analysis suggests the state emerged approximately 300 years after the commencement of large-scale monumental construction.

The Hawaiian islands, where, in Earle's assessment, a state-level polity arose in the complete absence of any urban formations. The authors bolster their argument with a reference to Robert Hommon's research (2013: 129). From this critical perspective, classical nomadic empires also constitute a significant exception. Their political system is often characterized as a *supercomplex chiefdom* that does not meet the standard criteria for statehood, despite the confirmed existence of cities through extensive archaeological excavation (Kradin 2007, 2020).

These findings are partially corroborated by an analysis of data from 289 premodern and early state societies in Peter Peregrine's *Atlas of Cultural Evolution* (Peregrine 2003). Research indicates a strong statistical correlation between politogenesis and urbanization. However, notable exceptions exist, including societies with only one or two tiers of administrative hierarchy (i.e., chiefdoms) that contained large settlements of over 4,000 inhabitants. The inverse scenario is also documented, whereby complex societies with three or more hierarchical levels (super-complex chiefdoms and early states) lacked urban centers altogether (Kradin 2018: 10–11).

This conclusion is further supported by data from the SESHAT Global History Databank, where urbanization is treated as a key indicator of social complexity, yet a consistent correlation is not universally observed across all cases (Turchin et al. 2018: 10, 13). Nevertheless, the overall evidence confirms that urbanization was intrinsically linked to the origin of the state, even if the relationship was not perfectly deterministic.

CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary scholarship on state formation has significantly diverged from classical theories prevalent in traditional historical, political science, and juridical literature. This paradigm shift is characterized by four principal developments. First, research has established that political centralization was influenced by a multitude of interdependent factors, rejecting monocausal explanations. Second, modern historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists generally concur that state genesis was driven by two interrelated processes: the imperative for social integration in increasingly complex societies (the *integrative* theory) and the necessity to manage internal social conflicts (the *conflict* or *class* theory).

Third, analyses of sociocultural evolution have identified a sequence of stages marked by increasing social complexity, progressing from local hunter-gatherer groups through medium-scale societies to complex polities (such as chiefdoms), and ultimately to early and mature forms of pre-industrial statehood. Fourth, scholarship now recognizes that the emergence of *hierarchical* societies (chiefdoms and states) represents only one trajectory of social evolution, which developed concurrently with various forms of *non-hierarchical* complex societies. This recognition substantiates the contemporary understanding of social evolution as fundamentally *multilinear*.

In schematic terms, the general evolutionary pattern of pre-industrial societies may be represented as follows:

Table 1

Evolution of pre-industrial societies

Strategy: heterarchy	Evolution stage: pre-industrial	Strategy: hierarchy
city-state	pre-industrial civilization	pre-industrial (agrarian) state
polis	archaic civilization	early state
tribal confederation	complex society	complex chiefdom
tribe	middle rang society	chiefdom
egalitarian society	local group	transegalitarian society

Apparently, significant progress in the study of state formation in the future may be associated primarily not with history and anthropology, but with archaeology, where new sources on this topic may emerge. Modeling historical processes offers enormous potential, especially in the context of using big data (Turchin 2003, 2016; Turchin, Currie et al. 2018). However, other disciplines related to this topic (political science, sociology, jurisprudence) should not remain aloof from new concepts. This will not only enrich the teaching of classical disciplines with fresh ideas but

also provide new impetus for the development of theoretical concepts about the state within these disciplines. Many contemporary aspects of the theory of state and law can only be properly understood and interpreted in relation to the historical origin and development of these phenomena.

The process of politogenesis can be productively analyzed by analogy with neolithization, wherein the defining features of a civilization or early state did not emerge as a monolithic package, but appeared asynchronously due to specific local conditions and historical contingencies. Consequently, societal complexity often reached a “civilizational” threshold prior to the crystallization of formal state institutions. This pattern underscores that politogenesis was a complex, multifactorial, and multivariate process, characterized by multiple evolutionary pathways.

Future research into this perennial problem will likely be advanced through two primary methodological approaches: systematic comparative analysis (Peregrine 2001, 2004; Smith M. 2012) and the continued refinement of middle-range theories that bridge abstract models with empirical data (Ellen 2010; Smith M. 2011, 2023).

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СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ТЕНДЕНЦИИ В ДИСКУССИИ О ПРОИСХОЖДЕНИИ ГОСУДАРСТВА

Н.Н. Крадин

В статье рассматриваются современные тенденции в изучении происхождения государства, фокусирующиеся на теоретических разработках, последовавших за классическими работами 1970-х гг. Анализируется эволюция ключевых концепций, включая теорию «раннего государства» (Классен и Скальник), и её влияние на различные научные школы, с определённым акцентом на российскую историографию. Акцентируется внимание на дискуссии между функционалистскими/интегративными и конфликтными теориями государства. Также рассматриваются сложные, недетерминистические взаимосвязи между урбанизацией и политогенезом, подчёркивается значимость многолинейной социальной эволюции, при которой иерархические государства сосуществовали с неиерархическими (гетерархическими) сложными обществами. Анализ завершается выводом о том, что дальнейший прогресс в понимании истоков государства связан с междисциплинарными подходами, использованием археологических данных, сравнительным анализом.

Ключевые слова: раннее государство, политогенез, социальная эволюция, урбанизация, городская революция, многолинейность, вождество, гетерархия, теоретическая археология.

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