Archaeology Essay

Structural features

Communication features

Discuss how Archaeology can be used to identify and explain the characteristics of the state. Identify the most persuasive arguments used to explain increasing social complexity during primary state formation.

Introductory paragraph providing background to the topic, and using words from the title (state, social, complex, archaeological)

For thousands of years, humans lived in relatively small hunter-gatherer bands, generally based on kin ties; in some places in the world this form of social organisation still exists. However, by far the most common social organisation in the world today is that of the state; the first example of this type of society emerged in Mesopotamia, around 5000 years ago. States differ from hunter-gatherer bands in that they are not egalitarian, the society has a hierarchical structure; they are more complex than chiefdoms as they comprise several communities rather than just a few, and have a centralised government with power over religion, war, law and taxation; there is also heterarchical differentiation within each stratum as well as hierarchical distinctions. There are various characteristics of the state that can be recognised archaeologically, which **I will outline initially; however, an important part of a state is the ideology which binds its people together, and this is harder to see in the archaeological record, particularly before people had written records. This makes it difficult to explain why societies became more complex and eventually formed states. I will look at the explanations advanced by Wittfogel, Carneiro, Marx and Flannery, as well as the more recent post-processualism theory**.

Use of personal pronoun 'I'. some disciplines encourage this, and others consider it inappropriate style – check with your tutor.

Statement of purpose outlining the organisation. Includes information about the challenges involved, and key theorists are named.

Paragraphs to develop the background information necessary

In order to recognise a state, it is important to consider both the site, and the surrounding area as a whole; since a defining feature of the state is that it comprises many communities, the site hierarchy of an area must be taken into account, as well as the settlement pattern. A survey can be done to determine a site hierarchy of a particular area. A state society will generally show a site hierarchy with hamlets, villages and small towns ranged around larger towns and one or two urban centres, whereas a band society will have a narrower range of variation in site size, and all sites will be relatively small (Renfrew & Bahn 1996). **For example**, in Southwest Iran on the Susiana Plain, there is evidence of four different sizes of settlement, ranging from small villages of less than 0.9 hectares, through villages of 2.3 hectares and small centres of 5.3 hectares, to large centres of 14.8 hectares. Finally, there was Susa, which today might

Example used to clarify the description

have been called a capital, which was around 25 hectares in size (Wright & Johnson 1975). The settlement pattern can also be taken into account; the geographer Walter Christaller developed the Central Place Theory, which stated that in a uniform landscape, the spatial patterning of settlements would be perfectly regular; central places, i.e. towns or cities, would be equidistant and surrounded by satellite rings of smaller settlements. Although a uniform landscape is rarely found in nature, in a state a ring of smaller settlements surround a ring of larger settlements, which in turn surround the major centre (Renfrew & Bahn 1996).

Tenses mixed: present for definitions and present day descriptions, past for historical descriptions, conditionals for theoretical ideas

Conditional language of theory and hypothesis

Site hierarchy and settlement patterns are useful, but they do not give us detailed information about the complexity of the society, just that the state is larger and more varied than a chiefdom. Childe (1950) outlined ten characteristics of the state; the five primary characteristics are:

Paragraphs taking the discussion into the next level of complexity

1. Urbanisation
2. Economic interdependence, characterised by the specialisation of labour
3. Agricultural surplus
4. Stratified society
5. Unit based on residence rather than kinship

He also outlined five secondary characteristics:

1. Monumental public works
2. Long-distance trade
3. Standardised art
4. Writing or recording
5. Maths and science, for example arithmetic, geometry and astronomy

Some of these characteristics though do not emerge until later in the process of state formation; writing did not emerge in Mesopotamia until 3200BC, whereas there is evidence that state formation began in the Ubaid period, 5800 – 4000 BC. **This is suggested by** the intra-site hierarchy seen at Tell Abada in Central Mesopotamia, where there is a continuum in the size of houses suggesting wealth differentials, and by the occurrence of temple-like buildings, as well as by evidence of pottery workshops, suggesting specialist ceramic production (McMahon 2010). In addition, in order to muster the labour force required to build monumental works, some form of centralised administration is likely to already have been in place. An exception to this would be the stone monuments,

Evidence of critical analysis

such as Stonehenge, built by people during the Neolithic, prior to the emergence of a state (Renfrew & Bahn 1995).

In order to recognise increasing social complexity during early state formation, it **may be better** therefore to look for evidence of the emergence of a social hierarchy, increasing urbanisation and economic developments such as increased trade and craft specialisation. Social stratification can be inferred in a number of ways from the archaeological record: firstly from variation in the size and complexity of residential buildings in the settlement, but also from variation in burials, as differential treatment of people in death is likely to reflect differential status in life. An example of variation in building size is seen in San José Mogote; during the Tierras Largas phase, 1500 – 1150BC, all the houses were fairly similar sizes; however by the San José phase, 1150 – 850BC, most houses were small (15-24m2), but several were much bigger than the others and built on low stone platforms. They were often whitewashed and contained larger concentrations of marine products, high-quality chert, mica, magnetite and deer bones than the smaller structures. **Differences in burials also begin to appear**, as some individuals were buried without grave goods, but others had jade labrets and earspools, and ceramic vessels decorated with either a serpent or jaguar motif (Blanton *et al*. 1981). These changes indicate that different social ranks were emerging, with one class having more wealth or power than the other. The burials of the Longshan cultures also begin to show differentiation during the Late Neolithic, just prior to the emergence of the Shang state; a tomb at Hutougou comprises a burial mound enclosed by a stone circle, inside of which are painted pottery cylinders; it has been suggested that those buried within this enclosure were more privileged than those buried in the multiple cist chambers built outside the burial mound. Also, at Dawenkou, some graves have 'ledges' built around the coffins; these graves have almost twice as many grave goods as those without the increased labour investment, again suggesting that they were of higher status or were wealthier. In the cemetery at Chengzi, 62% of the graves have no graves goods and are located in the eastern part of the cemetery, but 5-7% have caskets and high quality ceramics, and are in the northern part; this suggests the emergence of not just one or two important individuals such as chiefs or leaders, but a new class of social elites (Barnes 1993).

Cautious language to make suggestions

Use of present tense to relate a historical evolution. This is sophisticated tense use, and has the effect of bringing the past to life

Economic changes may also signify increasing social complexity, especially the emergence of full time craftsmen, as this implies economic interdependence showing a wider scale of social integration. Craft specialisation can be seen from concentrations

of artefacts relating to different crafts, as in villages the artefactual arrays are generally similar for each house as people were mostly self-sufficient. For example, at Huánuco Pampa, a city of the Incan empire, there is a compound of 50 buildings with thousands of special ceramic jars and dozens of spindle whorls and weaving implements, suggesting the specialised production of beer and textiles (Renfrew & Bahn 1996). Economic interdependence can be seen in the Valley of Oaxaca, as the major centre, Monte Albán, was founded on a hilltop far away from productive agricultural land; this indicates that they **must** have relied on the surrounding settlements to provide them with food (Blanton *et al.* 1981).

Good use of sources to support arguments

Use of modal verb 'must' to show deduction based on evidence

Several explanations have been advanced to account for increased social complexity during primary state formation. E. Service (1975) saw the state as a natural stage in human evolution; he proposed that societies are arranged on a continuum of complexity, from hunter-gatherer bands, through to chiefdoms, with the state as the pinnacle of social complexity. **However, this theory does not account for the collapse of societies, and does not explain why there are many societies today that are not states, and yet show no indication of evolving into one**.

Clear evidence of critical analysis

Other archaeologists have focused on specific causes of state formation; Wittfogel (1957) advanced the theory that irrigation management led to increasing social complexity. His theory is that as most social complexity is based on agriculture, irrigation would have been very important to people in early sedentary societies, as it would have been the most achievable way to increase productivity. However, irrigation systems require organised mass labour both to build and then maintain them; in order to achieve this there needs to be a centralised administration to initiate the project and make decisions. Once an irrigation system was in place, wealth differentials would have been created, as the fields closest to the channels would have been most productive. The need to keep track of seasonal and annual fluctuations in rainfall might have led to the invention of calendrical systems, and the administration associated with the systems may have encouraged the development of writing. The transport of labour would have required road systems, and defensive works and an army would be needed to protect the systems. Thus Wittfogel argues that irrigation management could have led to the formation of the state (Wenke 1990). However, he advances no explanation for how the original labour force would have been assembled, or why. Indeed, irrigation systems may not have needed a large

labour force at all. Woodbury (1961) has done research into the Hohokam irrigation systems in Arizona, and has calculated that only 25 men would have been needed to dig a canal 2 metres wide by 1 metre deep and 2-3 miles long, in the few months between harvesting and planting. Also, Hohokam material culture comprises only a few distinctive burials, which could be those of chiefs, and some luxury imported items from Mexico, suggesting that there was no centralised authority other than that of the tribal elders or chief. Woodbury also cites interviews from the nineteenth century, in which the local Pima people revealed that their irrigation systems were built as a result of village cooperation, on the initiative of an individual, who did not even necessarily have to be an elder or headman. Although ethnographic parallels are not always representative of societies in the past, this does show that irrigation systems would not necessarily have led to increasing social complexity.

Warfare is an unfortunate constant in human society, and it is therefore not surprising that some scholars **see** competition as a driving force behind increasing social complexity. Carneiro **uses** the coastal valleys of Peru **to illustrate** his theory that warfare, together with agricultural circumscription, produced increasing social complexity and the emergence of the Inca state. He **argues** that once villages began to grow in size, groups would split off and colonise new parts of the valley, but as the valleys were bounded on one side by the sea, on the other by desert, and surrounded by mountains, eventually all the arable land would be occupied. Although production could be intensified through irrigation and terracing, the population would increase at a faster rate and so people would turn to warfare as a way of acquiring more land; the people they defeated would become politically subordinate, creating a class structure within the new society. Villages fighting villages would progress to chiefdoms fighting chiefdoms, until eventually a state was created (Carneiro 1970). **However, Carneiro's theory has two main flaws; first the assumption that the population could outgrow its food supply; societies use many methods to control population growth, such as marriage rules, abortion and infanticide. Second, his theory is difficult to prove archaeologically, as evidence for warfare, such as burned villages and mass graves, must be found associated in time and space with features of a state such as monumental architecture (Wenke 1990).** There is little evidence for population growth before the emergence of a state; in fact in Southwest Iran there was a decrease in population prior to state formation (Wright & Johnson 1975). Also, in the Valley of Oaxaca, before the founding of Monte Albán people had nowhere near realised the agricultural potential of the valley,

Verbs to state the opinion of scholars

Clear evidence of critical analysis

and population growth did not spread out evenly throughout the valley; it occurred in only the Etla arm and even there, growth was mostly within San José Mogote itself (Blanton *et al.* 1981).

Marx sees the state as a product of exploitation rather than a method to solve problems such as population growth or the lack of water. His theory was that in an agricultural society wealth differentials would be created as not everyone would produce as much as others; this would lead to the creation of a ruling class who would then instate the other characteristic of the state, such as centralised administration, law and religion, as a means to justify their status. One of Marx's followers, Diakonov, argued that if wealth differentials can be created in a society, they will be. However these assumptions are unfounded, and throughout Mesopotamia there is no textual or archaeological evidence that the elites used force to maintain their position. Indeed, the seals depicting the construction of monumental public buildings suggest collaborative labour and a communal effort, possibly inspired by a civic ideology (McMahon 2010).

So far, theories have focused on a single cause, or the interaction of only two or three causes. Flannery (1972) on the other hand believes that it is not possible to explain increasing social complexity in all places with the same factor; however he does think the processes involved are the same. His theory is that with the transition to agricultural societies, there was an increase in the amount of internal differentiation within the society, leading to a need for more people to be in charge of various aspects of society, such as deciding when to plant or religion, which would in turn require someone to oversee them. This creates more classes in the society, and produces a central administration characteristic of a state (Wenke 1990). However, again it is difficult to relate this theory to the archaeological record, and it does not account for the collapse of societies (McMahon 2010).

Paragraph to discuss a more complex view

Most recently the post-processualist school of thought has emerged; this claims that we will never be able to understand the reasons for increasing social complexity, as much of human behaviour is illogical and the role of the individual is not necessarily represented in the archaeological record. **Although this opinion seems a little defeatist, it is difficult to see the remains of individual action and ideology without textual records, which did not emerge until after the state had first been formed.**

Paragraph to discuss more recent views

Clear evidence of critical analysis

As the state arose in many different places, from Mesopotamia to Mesoamerica, independently of each other, and once established developed in similar ways, many archaeologists have looked for a unifying theory or factor to explain increasing social complexity. However, in many ways, I find myself leaning towards the post-processualist opinion that we cannot understand the reasons for the origin of the state. In many cases it appears to be the ideology of a society that causes its members to collaborate together in a unit larger than just a few communities, and this ideology is difficult to recognise in the archaeological record, particularly before the advent of writing systems. I believe that each state must be considered separately in terms of the factors affecting it at the time of its conception; to me it seems more likely that the state was a way to solve problems rather than a result of the exploitation of some people by others. As states collapse and form again, as is seen in the Valley of Oaxaca during the Monte Albán periods III to V, it seems to be that forming a state was a response to factors outside the communities involved, whether that was drought or warfare or something else, that caused them to adhere more closely to their unifying ideology and form a larger, more cohesive society, which once the stress had been removed, was no longer needed.

Use of personal pronoun 'I' to give critical evaluation of the discussion and to draw personal conclusions. Use of personal pronouns Check this style with your tutor.

References

APA Referencing system (see Chapter 8, Referencing with accuracy)

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Diana and Tom's Comment

This essay provides a thorough background to the topic, and draws on respected archaeologists in the field. The essay is well-structured and easy to follow. In addition, the writer's voice is clear throughout with a good level of critical analysis and evaluation, leading to well-founded and justified conclusions.

Interestingly, many of the sources are not contemporary, but this is a reflection of the subject area , as the essay is drawing on archaeologists over the past century and their views on the approach to analysis of archaeological data. For other disciplines, using so many references that are thirty years old or more could be considered unacceptable.