# Emergence of Chiefdoms and States: A Spectrum of Opinions

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## INTRODUCTION

As has been already mentioned in the introductory editorial comment that opens this issue, the discussion has demonstrated a profound interest in its subject, and we would like to express our gratitude to Carneiro and all the discussants. This discussion presents a very wide spectrum of opinions on a rather wide range of important topics. One can also find a wide spectrum of opinions, a sort of unique snapshot of the current state of Political Anthropology as regards the study of the emergence of chiefdoms and states, as well as the driving forces of sociopolitical evolution.

The discussion has demonstrated that none of the proposed approaches can be characterized as being absolutely right. In certain respects the presented critique of some points of Carneiro's theory looks convincing, but in some other cases Carneiro's reasoning appears more persuasive. Below we shall try to make as more an objective assessment of the present discussion as possible.

## CARNEIRO'S UNEXPECTED DECISION

Carneiro's circumscription theory has become very widely recognized in the sense that it is always taken into account when the leading approaches to the study of state formation are analyzed. Almost all the discussants (further also referred to as participants) recognize certain merits of this theory, even when disagreeing with Carneiro or criticizing its certain points. Some participants of our

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discussion (Feinman, Gibson, Hakami, Spier, Marcus, and Wason) remark that in certain respects this theory has influenced them (even if they reject it). However, forty years have passed since its emergence, and it was only in 1998 when Carneiro published a paper that offered a significant further development of the theory in question (Carneiro 1998). Almost nobody expected Carneiro to make any major amendments to its theory, as it looked as a sort of classical frozen scheme. Hence, it was especially unexpected and especially pleasant to see a substantially advanced theory. Naturally, we are very grateful to Carneiro for his courage and determination. The point that Robert found energy to renovate his theory in a rather substantial way testifies that his circumscription theory is not a frozen scheme, but a creative concept that can be further improved (and that, of course, not immune from certain defects).

Actually, the discussants have expressed various opinions on this point; some contend that the change has not been substantial (*e.g.*, Kurtz, p. 67–69), and, what is more, the earlier theory (presented in 1970) was more integral, whereas the present-day version lacks epistemological rigor. However, many discussants (Feinman, Hakami, Wason, and Yi) maintain that the theory has been significantly improved, and now it describes much better the processes of the emergence of chiefdoms and states (though, of course, much space for its further improvement remains). We also agree that the current version of Carneiro's theory represents a substantial step forward. Creative thinking is clearly visible in Carneiro's detailed answer to his critics – as within it he continues to revise some of his points suggesting further improvements to his theory.

## THE VALUE OF CARNEIRO'S THEORY

Notwithstanding all the objections to this theory, many discussants express the idea that Carneiro's article in the present issue is valuable at least because it has a firm scientific basis. Let us make two quotes: ‘In times where mainstream Anthropology still lacks any scientific standards and is occupied by postmodern and eclectic approaches, articles with Carneiro's kind of conclusive argumentation are more than welcome’ (Hakami, p. 62). Peter N. Peregrine adds: ‘Despite my critiques, I believe Carneiro points us in a direction we must follow if we hope to ever fully understand the rise of states’ (p. 83).

Of course, there are some critics (*e.g.*, Small, p. 92; Meijl, p. 81) who maintain that Carneiro's article does not correspond to the present-day state of the scientific development. Yet we find such statements too categorical. In any case one could hardly fail to acknowledge that Carneiro (even when he expresses questionable ideas) thinks in a rather logical and sober way. He makes his opponents think, he makes them look for their own explanations (see, *e.g.*, Kurtz's contribution to this issue).

## PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

We believe that the discussion has shown that for the development of more adequate theories of the emergence of complex social systems (including chiefdoms and states) one needs to take into account six important points.

The first: we deal with a complex system of driving forces and causes of politogenesis with a certain hierarchy (both generally evolutionary and situational).

The second: we should distinguish between a wider process of politogenesis and a more narrow process of the state formation.

The third: we deal with the diversity of ways in which complex and supercomplex societies emerge; the absence of clear classification of those ways leads to the lack of understanding, which could make discussions of respective subjects rather sterile. In any case it appears necessary to take into account that chiefdoms were just one of many types of medium-complex societies, that in addition to early states there were also their analogues and alternatives.

The fourth: there were various models of state formation.

The fifth: many researchers still underestimate the role of military factor.

The sixth: some students of political evolution still retain unilinear approaches, whereas the recognition of evolutionary multilinearity can immediately lead the discussion to a more fruitful direction.

Let us consider now some of these points in more detail.

## THE ROLE OF WAR

For a few decades Political Anthropology tended to underestimate the role of war in political evolution. One of Carneiro's main con-

tributions is the constant defense of the role of military factor in the emergence of chiefdoms and states. Many of the discussion participants rightly point to this contribution of the author of circumscription theory (*e.g.*, Small[1]; Sneath, p. 100; see also some of our publications, *e.g.*, Grinin, Korotayev 2009). Guidi (p. 57) even speaks about 'a sort of prophetic feature in Carneiro's theories' in the sense that Carneiro's initial theory was a precursor of the future growth of the recognition of the importance of the war factor in the state formation.

At present anthropologists' attitudes toward the role of war change. However, Alessandro Guidi's claim that 'today, an important role of warfare for the triggering of social stratification seems unquestionable' (p. 57), appears to be an exaggeration. Even within the current discussion some discussants do not allot to the war a significant or definite role, or oppose to it some other factors: tradition and culture, religious worship *etc*. (see, *e.g.*, Barry, Carmack, Claessen, Gibson, Ganzha and Shinakov, Spier, Rozov, and Hakami); this seems to indicate that the role of war as a *very significant* factor of state formation still tends to be underestimated. That is why we would rather agree with Small's idea that Carneiro's 'challenge of understanding the importance of warfare and the appearance of state remains to be answered' (pp. 94–95). In this respect we may consider the current discussion as a response to this challenge. The analysis demonstrates that up to a certain extent an important role of wars in the state formation is recognized by most discussants – in addition to those who have already been mentioned one can note, *e.g.*, Lozny, Marcus, Wason, Feinman, Yi, and Peregrine *etc*. Thus, the discussion has shown that, notwithstanding all the differences, there is a common platform – in particular, *many participants recognize the role of war (and coercion) as an important or even the most important element and driving force in the formation of the medium-complex and complex sociopolitical systems (including the state)*, though not in the rigorous form used by Carneiro.

The point that the war is a very ancient phenomenon that emerged long before the Agrarian Revolution and acquired an especially large scale in the 'Barbarian' societies,[2] indicates that the war is a rather heterogeneous phenomenon and its role may be rather different in different contexts. That is why it is necessary to

develop the evolutionary typology of wars, to analyze more profoundly the connection between warfare and politogenesis in various circumstances, environments, and periods. Actually, some discussants point to this; they also indicate that in certain respects Carneiro both 'narrowed' the role of warfare in the politogenesis, and exaggerated its role in the process of the state formation, because he reduced it to just one of its varieties (Feinman, Marcus, Small). Indeed, in the earlier version of his theory he ascribed quite definitely[3] all the evolutionary importance to just one (and a rather rare one) – to the war caused by demographic pressure and the deficit of land that was actually the war to expand living space (see, *e.g.*, Carneiro, p. 27). Note that this type of war is quite infrequent in history.[4] Still one should note that in his revised theory Carneiro has somehow advanced, yet quite inconsistently, in terms of clearing up the role of wars in political evolution. We will return to this point later.

We agree with the view of many discussants that when the other conditions of the complexity growth are absent, warfare may become virtually endless without leading to any significant complexity growth (a salient example is provided here by the Papuans of the New Guinea Highlands; see about this also Claessen, pp. 36–37).

## MULTILINEARITY AND CAUSES OF THE STATE FORMATION

As we have already mentioned, the discussion, from our point of view, has demonstrated again the importance of the recognition of evolutionary multilinearity, in particular the diversity of pathways to the formation of complex and supercomplex social systems. In the meantime we agree with Marcus that, notwithstanding all the peculiarities (and even uniqueness) of each individual case, there were also certain common causes of the emergence of complex societies in general (and states in particular). 'It is now clear that societies in many parts of the ancient world arrived at similar solutions to the same problems' (Marcus, p. 74). This may be a common platform for the study of the emergence of complex societies, in general, and states – in particular (see also some of our publications: Bondarenko, Grinin, and Korotayev 2002; Grinin, Korotayev 2009, 2011). We suggest proceeding from the fact that

societies by definition develop in different ways. That the transition to a new level (quality, model, form *etc.*) is realized in the bundle of different variants, on the one side of which there is an appearance of a perspective model of development in the future, and on the other – the appearance of a non-perspective model which will eventually bring a society to the evolutionary dead-end, from which an independent and successful outcome is impossible or extremely difficult. It is also very important that those non-perspective pathways of some societies contribute to a great degree to the success of the 'perspective' (in the long run) model. That is why in some cases one could observe the formation of state analogues, in some other cases the early states would emerge (in general, the formation of the latter needed richer resources and higher levels of population concentration).[5] We believe it is necessary to distinguish between the causes of the formation of complex societies and the causes of the emergence of the states in order to understand why the formation of complex states sometimes (but not always) led to the emergence of the state. We are very glad to note that our effort has not gone unnoticed. 'To begin with, Russian anthropologists have outlined that terms such as the state only apply to part of the spectrum of terminal social complexity (works are many but see essays in Grinin, Carneiro, Bondarenko, Kradin, and Korotayev 2004)', maintains David Small (p. 92).

Many discussants emphasize the diversity of pathways, but this needs to be done in a more systematic way. Interesting approaches to this may be found in the comments by Kowalewski[6] and Yi[7]. In the meantime we agree that 'it is the pattern and variation in such data that ought to be the subject of theory-building' (Kowalewski, p. 65).

However, when analyzing political evolution one should also take into account the diversity of pathways to statehood proper (among comments considering this aspect see, *e.g.*, Small, van der Vliet, and Claessen, see also Gibson). It is just this aspect of multi-path transition to a state that has become an important basis for the criticism of Carneiro's suggested conception in which the unilinearity underlies political evolution (which is both a merit and a shortcoming of the theory). Yet the question of diversity of pathways to the statehood inevitably correlates with the problem of revealing the causes of the emergence of the state.

**State formation causes** have always been an object of active scholarly research and discussion. Actually, this is one of the basic issues of the present discussion. In Carneiro's initial theory the circumscribed demographic pressure was supposed to lead through the intensification of warfare between villages trying to conquer each other to the growth of political complexity, to the emergence of chiefdoms, and, eventually, states. In his article in the current issue Carneiro modifies significantly his original theory. He pays much more attention to the point that in many cases geographical circumscription may be substituted by scarcity of certain resources, whereas wars start to be waged in order to control those resources, wars provoke political centralization, and so on (we will discuss the resource factor in more detail further below). However, of particular importance is that Carneiro pays attention to the point that though wars of conquest could contribute (in certain circumstances) to the chiefdom formation, this was more often when chiefdoms emerged as a result of military activities of village alliances led by a military chief (*pendragon*) even if those wars did not lead to conquests; chiefdoms could emerge as a result of the formation of alliances established to wage wars of various kinds (including wars of defense), they could even emerge as a result of the threat of war.[9] Carneiro himself maintains:

> My earlier view was that chiefdoms arose by direct and successive military conquest of one village after another by the strongest one among them. And some chiefdoms may indeed have arisen in this way. More recently, though, I have come to question that this was the way in which most chiefdoms arose. Today I am more inclined to believe that while warfare was still the mechanism involved, it produced its effect in a somewhat different way. I would now focus on the actions of the *ad hoc* war leader of a village who, acting as the head of an alliance, repeatedly and successfully led a group of villages in military actions against their enemies (thus cementing those villages into a chiefdom) (Carneiro, p. 17).

In the meantime, in the process of his narrative he often returns to his original theory, putting the wars of conquest at the forefront. In particular, he concludes his main article in this issue with the following words:

> A heightened incidence of *conquest* (our emphasis. – *L.G.*, *A.K.*) warfare, due largely to an increase in population pressure, gave rise to the formation of successively larger political units, with autonomous villages being followed by chiefdoms, the process culminating in certain areas with the emergence of the state (Carneiro, p. 27).

And there is a certain inconsistency here. It may stem from the point that Carneiro does not distinguish sufficiently the processes of the formation of chiefdoms, on the one hand, and of the states, on the other; and this is especially relevant with respect to the influence of wars on those processes. Carneiro even does not consider the hypothesis that factors and mechanisms of the chiefdom formation may differ significantly from the ones of the state formation.

Yet, we can only welcome Carneiro's step toward an evident improvement of his theory. For us personally, it is rather important that our positions on the role of war have become much closer to each other. We have always recognized the important role of the military factor and pointed that we do not know a single case when this factor did not play an important role in the state formation; however, in each case the combination of factors was unique, and not in all the cases the military factor was the most important (see Grinin, Korotayev 2009: 70–74). In general, from our point of view, this factor tends to accelerate state formation processes; these are just some cases when the conquest played a really dominant role in the state formation. Even when wars did not result in conquests, the process of state formation could be assisted and stimulated by the establishment of various military alliances (including ones established for defense purposes), by the threat of war, by the introduction of military innovations and so on.

Carneiro describes his theory in much detail in two articles within the present issue, so here it does not make sense to go into its details. What is important here is to emphasize that many discussants recognize the importance of warfare in political evolution, they also recognize Carneiro's contribution to the study of this issue. However, virtually none of the discussants accepts Carneiro's theory without reservations, none of them takes Carneiro's position entirely. And this does not appear to be accidental. As has already been mentioned above, it is impossible to reduce all the diversity of

political evolution just to one model. From our point of view it appears necessary in any case to distinguish between the situations when the states emerge as a result of the consolidation of typically pre-state polities, and the situations when states emerge as a result of the transformation of the state analogues – the non-state polities with levels of complexity comparable to the ones of the states. In some respects those are substantially different models. However, within this context it appears especially important to emphasize that in both models in order that state would emerge a certain level of complexity should have been achieved, state formation also needs sufficiently numerous (and sufficiently stratified) population as well as a certain level of the development of political culture and ideology.[10] In this respect, Claessen's approach looks rather relevant (Claessen spelled it out in numerous publications [see, *e.g.*, Claessen 2002, 2010] as well as in his comment in the present issue of our journal). On the other hand, there is also need in some continuous event that could serve as a trigger for the process, without which the process may not start even in presence of all the necessary conditions. The trigger was mentioned by Claessen (*Ibid.*). We arrived at similar conclusions, as we believe that some abrupt changes of habitual conditions are necessary for the start of the state formation process – as a reaction to such changes social systems (and social actors) have to adapt very fast sometimes creating for this new political and administrative forms and institutions, which could initiate (or advance) the state formation process. That is why we consider Claessen's approach to be rather fruitful. However, the defect of his approach is constituted by his vague and hesitant evaluation of the role of wars. In this respect Carneiro's position seems preferable, as war and threat of war belong to the most wide-spread factors producing abrupt changes that could induce substantial socioevolutionary shifts. A real threat of war, or 'the fear of attack may have been an even more powerful force in encouraging populations to nucleate' (Marcus, p. 75), whereas such a nucleation could constitute an important step toward the state formation. However, in addition to military factors, abrupt changes may be connected with migrations and/or establishment of new settlements, with the acquisition by some social system of certain special advantages (*e.g.*, trade monopoly with respect to some important resources), especially rapid population growth or rapid

growth of wealth, end of isolation, contacts with significantly more complex societies, and so on. Some of such cases (in particular, migrations and transfers of capitals/establishment of new capitals) that often result in the destruction of old social structures are mentioned in comments by Jianping Yi (pp. 126–127), Lozny (pp. 72–73), Marcus (pp. 76–77), and Claessen (pp. 36–37), as well as in the articles authored by Carneiro himself.

## THE DEFINITION OF THE STATE

The issue of the state definition is rather tightly connected with the issue of the state emergence. However, this issue is one of the most debatable. There hundreds of various state definitions. We would like to emphasize that the definition of the state by Carneiro is one of the most useful:

> A state is an autonomous political unit, encompassing many communities within its territory and having a centralized government with the power to draft men for war or work, levy and collect taxes, and decree and enforce laws (p. 136).

We have always recognized the usefulness of this definition and we are ready to agree with Kurtz (p. 69) that 'Carneiro's definition of the state is better than most'. However, it is also necessary to mention some defects of this definition that stem from the general position of Carneiro who adheres more or less consistently to the unilinear view of political evolution. We believe that Carneiro's definition does not sufficiently take into account the administrative and *organization* dimensions where the difference between the state and non-state forms of political organization is the most salient. For example, Carneiro's definition does not allow distinguishing the early state from some complex chiefdoms (*e.g.*, the ones of the Hawaiian Archipelago). This idea has been expressed rather well by Peter N. Peregrine:

> This is not a new problem, but it is one that makes Carneiro's theory easy to criticize, for he does not provide a clear definition (few have) for what a state actually is and, more importantly, what is very similar but not a state (like a complex chiefdom). This problem disappears if we look at states as part of a continuum that runs from acephalous societies to ones with strong political leaders. Our task then becomes explaining variation rather

> than presence or absence. I argue that explaining variation is the direction we must take theory-building in the future. Carneiro provides a solid foundation for that work (Peregrine, pp. 84–85).

We agree with Peregrine's suggestion, and in a number of our publications we have tried to demonstrate and explain such differences, in particular through the introduction of the notion of the early state analogues. However, this does not diminish the necessity to have a generally recognized definition of the state, possibly arrived at through a certain actual convention.

## URBAN PATHWAY OF STATE FORMATION, RESOURCE AND POPULATION CONCENTRATION

While considering the issue of diversity of pathways to statehood, it appears impossible to pass by the point that appears not to be reflected in Carneiro's theory – the urban pathway of state formation (and politogenesis in general). This seems to be a significant defect of Carneiro's approach. As is maintained by David Small, 'basing his theory on territorial states developed through conquest, Carneiro eschews two important alternate concepts, city-states, who rarely engage in territorial expansion, and the often overlooked *ethne* of ancient Greece, which were federations of communities with state-level centralization' (Small, p. 92). Indeed the 'urban' way of the state formation is rather wide-spread (note, however, that some political anthropologists consider *polis*-type structures as state analogues rather than early states). Yet, cities are mentioned by Carneiro very rarely, whereas the 'main track' of political evolution is presented as follows: *consolidation of a few villages into a simple chiefdom – consolidation of a few simple chiefdoms into a complex chiefdom – consolidation of a few complex chiefdoms into a state*. The circumscription theory with its central point – land shortage – correlates rather weakly with the urban way of the development of statehood. In the cities one can often observe both concentration and reshuffle of the population, the destruction of old communal and clan links, which contributes to the formation of new administration structures, and, consequently, to the state formation. It appears important to note that within the urban pathway of the politogenesis it turns out to be also possible to speak about the population and resource concentration,

but in some respect that is different from Carneiro's theory. In cities, the population and resource concentration plays a role that differs from the one described in this theory, and here it does not necessarily lead to wars. Cities often act as points of concentration of wealth in such forms that greatly facilitate the processes of politogenesis and state formation (a few interesting cases of the urban way of the state formation are mentioned in Yi's comment).

In general, the point that Carneiro introduced the resource concentration factor into his theory (which has been already mentioned above) strengthened it in a rather significant way. We ourselves always insisted that the state tends to emerge in the zone of the highest resource concentration (note that this is relevant not only with economic resources, but with human resources as well). However, Carneiro connects resource concentration to conquest wars too tightly,[11] whereas the resource concentration can be by itself an important factor of politogenesis and state formation.

The idea that population pressure can act as a factor that is able to create (within a certain context) new qualities deserves further attention. This is one of the strong aspects of Carneiro's theory, and many discussants note this (*e.g.*, Peregrine, Claessen, van der Vliet, and Marcus). However, we believe that the population concentration and demographic pressure are important not only as factors stimulating aggressive behavior. They are equally important as factors stimulating the development of new ways of administration, including the formation of state structures.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

We believe that, in general, our discussion can help us to move to a new level of our understanding of the state formation processes. On the one hand, it has demonstrated the viability of the circumscription theory. On the other hand, it has shown that we should develop further our understanding of the multilinearity and nonlinearity of the politogenesis, we should continue our work on the identification and classification of its alternative pathways (including various lateral trajectories) and their evolutionary potential. And, of course, more research is needed in order to make our understanding of the role of the military factor in the state formation processes more profound.

## NOTES

[1] He writes about 'closer understanding of the relationship between war and the rise of the archaic state – the importance of which Carneiro recognized over 40 years ago' (Small, p. 95).

[2] Guidi (pp. 56–57) pays much attention to this point in his commentary; see also Ganzha and Shinakov.

[3] This is not as definite with respect to the new version of this theory.

[4] In this respect we agree with van der Vliet who notes that in Ancient Greece, with all its so intensive warfare, 'the only example of military expansion and conquest here is Sparta, and its successful subjugation and conquest of a neighboring territory and its inhabitants happened as a consequence of Spartan state formation' (van der Vliet, p. 113). See also Yi's contribution who demonstrates that in Ancient China Carneiro's model was applicable to just a minority of cases.

[5] We ourselves have written a lot about this. See also Lozny's comment: 'States simply come from cores that happen to be larger (bigger, richer, better economies, *etc.*) and non-state complexities come from less resourceful structures' (p. 73).

[6] See, for example, Stephen Kowalewski's contribution where he mentions numerous examples of special ways of the complexity growth.

[7] As Yi notes, 'many materials found in China indicate that societies evolved from egalitarian villages to chiefdoms and to early states in a different way' (Yi, p. 123).

[8] Some tiny polities such as Aegean or Mayan *poleis* may have emerged with the reorganization of composite chiefdoms. Other early political systems seem to have emerged gradually from organizational changes to chiefdom confederacies (Gibson 2011, 2012).

[9] Sometimes also as a threat that might look not as conspicuous as a full-scale war, but that could have similarly profound consequences – this is a threat of violence in the form of pirates, raids, robberies, *etc*.

[10] We do not think that Carneiro's critique of Claessen was quite just. We have an impression that Carneiro failed to see the integrity of Claessen's theory reducing his theory of complex conditions of state formation to ideology only.

[11] Warfare over any valued resource, then, might reasonably be incorporated into the theory, alongside a shortage of arable land, as giving rise to conquest warfare and ifs political consequences (Carneiro, p. 21).

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