

Introduction to the Thematic Section

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The papers in this thematic section were originally presented in two venues. Approximately half of the contributions were delivered first in a session at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Anthropological Society in Indianapolis, Indiana in March, 1995. The full complement of presentations took place at the 94th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Washington, D.C., in November, 1995. Two participants in the Washington symposium chose not to include their papers in this section. A number of the papers have thus benefitted from several stages of discussion and criticism. While anthropologists (and especially archaeologists) dominated both panels, the disciplinary breadth represented by the various members contributed to an invigorating discussion which we now bring to the pages of this journal. In this attempt to reach a broad audience, however, we realize there is the problem of disciplinary specificity, i.e., the particular approaches and data with which scholars deal may not be easily comprehensible to those in other fields. For the current collection, this issue is especially acute for prehistorians, whose focus on the material record and a specialized archaeological terminology may confound some readers. The archaeologists have made efforts to minimize the use of esoteric jargon. In addition, chronological periods are clearly defined in order to fix the temporal setting. While some readers may already be very familiar with the periods in question, we thought it best to err on the side of caution.

Since its initial elaboration by Wallerstein (1974) twenty-two years ago, world systems theory (WST), in its various guises, has proved to be a remarkably flexible construct. Not only does the approach offer a way to model the rise of modern capitalism in the West, but also to study the interaction of peripheries and cores in ancient systems. The applicability to many different geographical regions across numerous chronological periods makes WST an important tool for the comparative study of cultures. As various authors have demonstrated, with some reworking, many of Wallerstein's concepts are useful. However, several scholars point out, quite correctly, that some concepts require a complete overhaul. The value of some recent work is twofold: 1) it demonstrates the weakness of the core-periphery dichotomy in the pre-capitalist world; 2) it exhibits a pattern of social dynamics that characterizes state politics in non-western settings in the past. One key contribution that

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anthropology, archaeology, and history can make to the world systems debate is to demonstrate that many historic and prehistoric states lacked the mechanisms to dominate the distant (and in some cases, even nearby) societies with which they interacted in order to procure various resources. Hall (1986), among others, pointed out the problem of depicting the effect of incorporation as uni-directional. He stressed the need to discuss culture contact as a dialogue in which both parties have at least some say in events, and

attempt to implement their own agendas. This point bears repeating, especially in an archaeological context. The issue also becomes clearer in the role that elites in the periphery play; they display considerable flexibility through their ability to negotiate a better deal (what one can call negotiated peripherality, unlike the mandated conditions espoused by some dependency theorists); historical studies that stress the role of leadership can deal effectively with this issue. The peer polity model espoused by some scholars is applicable to the conditions many city-state civilizations faced. The geographic dispersal of various resources often precluded the domination of vital commodities. Even when certain resources were concentrated, the polities often lacked the ability, and perhaps the incentive, to regulate access to the material. The point is that core/periphery exploitation needs to be demonstrated, not simply assumed. It is for precisely this reason that the interdisciplinary dialogue which occurs in this section is vital. It is valuable for archaeologists to discuss the process of exploitation with historians and others whose more complete data permit one to trace out in detail the nature of relations between core, periphery, and semiperiphery. Conversely, the archaeologist provides much greater time depth within which to test the ideas historians, sociologists, and others derive; prehistory is the laboratory for the study of long-term social change.

Another key issue that some authors raise is the multi-dimensionality of core-periphery distinctions. While it is true that the political and ideological components deserve greater attention, the economic dimension has not been fully explored yet. In particular, the role of production has not received as much attention as trade or exchange; some recent studies attempt to redress this oversight. The papers in this thematic section will address these and other key issues. The adoption of WST by anthropologists, sociologists, and historians demonstrates the broad applicability of this approach across time and space. WST provides a common framework within which scholars from various disciplines and with interests in diverse geographical and chronological zones can engage in a dialogue about recurring patterns of interaction among various cultures. WST, with its potential for studying past and present cultural interaction, continues to yield bountiful interdisciplinary fruit. Because that interaction can occur along political,

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economic, social, and religious/ritual dimensions, scholars from a variety of fields have tapped the rich potential of WST and adapted the ideas to their particular areas of interest. This process of adaptation or modification has led to many offshoots, but whether we call it WST, interregional interaction, or peer polity interaction, we are dealing with the same general phenomenon. It is this multi-dimensionality which allows WST to harbor such a diverse array of studies. I see WST as a powerful model which deflects the tendency in some areas, anthropology and archaeology included, to focus on differences to such a degree that we lose sight of the forest of similarities in cultural dynamics. What the perspective does, at least in part, is to provide a model for recognizing patterns which underlie social change. In this respect, one can understand WST in the context of other

generalizing perspectives, such as neo-evolutionism, cultural ecology, and cultural materialism. All of these approaches buck the trend in academic circles towards narrowly focused, subjective views which emphasize the roles of individuals, the complex nuances of meaning, and post-structural interpretations. Granted, such approaches, which one can gloss under the rubric "postmodern", make valid criticisms of rigidly positivistic methods, but the resultant relativism is often equally intellectually unpalatable. To be certain, postmodern analyses have opened our eyes to the extent to which knowledge is socially constructed. The problem is that the extreme wing of the school/movement often places studies in a relativistic quagmire that denies the possibility of cross-cultural comparison. In anthropology, and to a lesser extent in sociology, the camps are severely divided over the issue of whether the respective discipline is or is not a science. One of the major problems in coming to some resolution is that polemics have dominated this debate. The resolution of this academic dilemma will come only when scholars on both sides of the divide realize that several approaches, not just one, constitute science (Bell 1994). The unvarying core, however, is an emphasis on empiricism. WST is one approach that can lead the way in this rapprochement. First, it speaks to many different disciplines, as noted above. Second, as an outgrowth of marxian critiques of capitalism, many scholars who employ the approach engage in structural analysis; many have moved beyond purely economic concerns to discuss the subtle connections between, e.g., ideology and political hierarchies. Third, to understand the mechanisms of incorporation, exploitation, etc., WST studies concentrate on the particular historical circumstances of the cultures under scrutiny; this emphasis provides for a rich cross-fertilization to which history, ethnohistory, cultural anthropology, archaeology, sociology, economics and other fields can contribute and from which they can benefit. Human agency is often a major focus in these studies. The point that Hall (1986) and others have made is that we must not view

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incorporation as uni-directional, i.e., peoples in the periphery and semi-periphery actively engage in the economic and other interactions that define world-systems. Many of the papers in this section explore this very point in detail. The papers in this section fall into two basic groups. The first grouping deals with theoretical issues explicitly. Hall argues that cultural evolution must be studied from a world-system perspective. In addition, he outlines a number of the adjustments to WST to make it amenable to the analysis of non-capitalist societies; in particular, the nature of exchange networks, frontier interactions, and the local impact of global processes receive consideration. Shutes picks up on the last of these and examines the efficacy of WST in making sense of ethnographic data from Ireland and Greece. He outlines the manner in which farmers in both countries negotiate the nature of their involvement in the larger economic forces at play on the international scene. Peregrine tackles a different problem, the lack of work by WST theorists on the patterns of social collapse. Borrowing from Habermas, he poses the issue of world-system fragmentation as a matter of crisis in socio-political legitimation rather than

strictly economic conditions. He uses Tonga and Moundville as respective ethnographic and archaeological examples of this process. The second group of papers deals more directly with the application, and in some cases the criticism, of WST to specific data sets. The papers also fall into two geographic subcategories. The first is the New World, with Mesoamerica, the Andean region, and the North American Midwest represented, and the second is Europe. Feinman identifies two organizational modes, corporate-based and network-based, which demonstrate variable strategies in regional integration. A multi-scalar approach, he argues, is the most appropriate to study the differential nature of the Classic-Postclassic transition in the southern highlands of Oaxaca, Mexico. Alexander uses archaeological, historic, and ethnohistoric data from Yaxcava region of the Yucatan peninsula to explore the nature of local incorporation into the capitalist world-system. She finds architecture, the distribution of exotic products, and site structure to be good indicators of production organization in 18th and 19th century Yaxcava. Of particular interest is her emphasis on house lots because the study of such features tell us how individual families adapted to problems and opportunities raised by incorporation. Alexander frames the tension between cattle-raising on haciendas and subsistence farming on pueblo lands in terms of resistance to integration by the farmers. Kuznar examines Inca imperial policy in terms of core/periphery relations. The type of interaction varied depending on a number of traits (population size, political authority, kind and quantity of natural resources, and proximity to the capital at Cuzco) of the conquered people, and the Inca needs for manpower and basic materials. He argues that the Inca empire was

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incompletely integrated at the time of the Spanish conquest, but it had encountered problems as it expanded; the possibility of incorporating new polities became attenuated the further these were from the Cuzco core. Jeske subjects the Mississippian culture of the late prehistoric Midwest, commonly credited as being the most complex prehistoric society north of Mexico, to a world-systems treatment. He finds WST lacking in ability to explain the presence of ceremonial and ritual objects at various Mississippian and related sites in the Midwest. In brief, Jeske suggests WST fails to deal adequately with the non-capitalist nature of Mississippian culture. The papers with a European focus cover a number of time periods. Kardulias suggests that with some minor adjustments, WST is well-suited to the analysis of the Bronze Age interaction in the Aegean area. He argues for the presence of three interrelated levels for the Aegean world-system. While the three levels were nested one in the other, each did have some operations distinct to itself. The insular nature of Aegean trade networks facilitated the integration of activities, but the Bronze Age palaces, while important for the international trade, did not control all aspects of exchange in the second millennium B.C., i.e., cores did not completely dominate peripheries. Morris also takes the Aegean as his area of interest, but he focuses on the Iron Age of the first millennium B.C. when complex society reemerges in Greece after the Dark Age hiatus. In this period, Greece is in the role of periphery to the

dominant Near Eastern world-system. While oriental influence is clear during this period, Morris argues that the Greeks negotiated the character of their peripheral status, i.e., they selectively adopted eastern elements to meet their own particular social, political, and economic needs. In his discussion of the Romans in central Europe, Wells emphasizes a similar critical role for the residents of the periphery, in this case the people on or near the frontier of the Roman Empire. His careful examination of archaeological evidence from a number of excavations reveals the production at a number of sites of many materials vital to the operation of Roman forts along the frontier. The economic system was in fact quite decentralized. In addition, a number of imports came into Roman territory from Germany, Scandinavia, and eastern Europe, areas completely beyond imperial control. What this and many of the other papers offer is specific information and conceptual reevaluation in the effort to gain a better understanding of the complex processes of interregional and intersocietal interaction. Some emerge from this effort with a deeper appreciation and use for WST, while others find the perspective lacking in serious ways. The interlocutors in this exchange all gained from the effort to utilize or evaluate WST, despite the lack of complete agreement. While WST has proved to be a vital area for academic discourse, it is not universally

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accepted as the best paradigm for various disciplines to adopt. In the search for a panacea, some scholars extol the virtues of one approach over all others. Anthropologists in particular are aware of the pitfalls of such thinking; in the 19th century, evolutionism dominated academic debate, only to be shorn of its preeminent status when certain people correctly questioned some of its assumptions and weak empirical data base. Several of the papers below argue that WST provides at best a modest explanation for certain past events. It is, in fact, still legitimate to ask whether WST should be applied to precapitalist settings. The doubters among us provide important cautionary statements; we would do well to listen carefully to their admonitions. The inclusion of a broad range of opinions about the efficacy of WST does, in this way, serve its intended purpose as we move toward that elusive but vital middle ground.

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