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Juan Carlos Moreno García (ed.), *From house societies to states: early political organisation, from antiquity to the Middle Ages* (Multidisciplinary approaches to ancient societies 3). pp. 352, with b/w ills. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2022. ISBN 9781789258622, hardback £55.00.

The intention behind this volume (and others in the series) is to break compartmental divisions in the study of societies by multidisciplinary comparative approaches. By bringing together a number of chronologically-, culturally- and geographically-diverse focussed papers, the editor succeeds brilliantly in this aim and almost all of the authors have played the game by focussing on aspects of political organisation. The volume is a well-balanced overview that takes the reader from Bronze Age Mesopotamia to early Modern Southeast Asia, passing the Mediterranean but also Africa and Central America, and presenting different forms of political organisation. All this clearly shows that pre-modern forms of political organization have too long been regarded from a strictly evolutionary perspective rather than affording attention to agency, power sharing and varied historical trajectories. At the same time, this book presents a good introduction to a variety of cultures with the necessary references that will be appreciated by students and experts alike. This said, avoiding a Western perspective will always remain a challenge when approaching power and early states, but Moreno García's argumentation in the introduction (pp. 1-27) is a courageous and convincing attempt to do so. It is also wide sweeping, touching a large variety of ancient societies, but also by stressing various important features in how authority was yielded ('islands of authority', mobile societies, sharing of power etc.). He does not linger much on House Societies though, a theme that is much more the focus of the papers within the volume (e.g. Butterlin, Nakassis, Dueppen, etc.), including his own. Perhaps explicitly distinguishing between houses as domestic structures and *Houses* as social players would have made the volume somewhat easier to understand since it is not always clear whether a residential structure is meant or a larger social actor or estate in the Lévi-Straussian sense and this applies to several chapters.

The organizational structure of the volume seems largely chronological since it starts off with Pascal Butterlin's paper on "the great houses of Mesopotamia: Tripartite houses and the formation of the city-state" (28-55). He returns to the contrasting interpretations that concern the megalithic oval structures of Göbekli Tepe and the later buildings at Tepe Gawra and what they teach us about social relationships – egalitarian or not. Opinions differ considerably but the case of Tell Sabi Abyad where sealing practices were interpreted with shared storage facilities by semi-nomads is a fine example of how archaeological discoveries continue to change set ideas. Massimo Vidale next pinpoints the many problematic issues that still surround the Indus Valley civilisation (56-79) and how to interpret its social structure. He notes the different contrasting opinions that concern the absence of iconography, temples, palaces, and costly monuments and how this is mostly used to argue for the absence of a strictly hierarchical situation, as also the absence of an organised monopoly of violence. The existence of walled neighbourhoods within the few large urban centres conceivably suggests a heterarchical structure. But it is clear that the Indus Valley civilisation was not a large territorial state despite overall similarities in material culture.

Apart from a sizeable introduction, Juan Carlos Moreno García (80-122) also contributes with a long paper focussing on the different levels that can be recognised in pharaonic Egypt, at the same time putting the pharaoh's own power in a much needed perspective. He presents data that show that the unification was not a given but had to be achieved repeatedly, and that various types of social organization, including tribal structures, continued in tandem with mobile herding, implying that power density, as it is called, varied considerably. Royal iconography and monuments were more of a wishful thinking that an on-the-ground reality of absolute royal power. He hence argues convincingly that ancient Egypt was more "a confluence of different spheres of authority, more or less (formally) controlled by the king and organised on several levels" (p. 89). Interesting too is his discussion of the evidence for *Houses* (*per*), as estates or larger social actors. Textual evidence illustrates that some pharaohs tried to eradicate such *Houses*. Despite these attempts, they remained a consistent element in the social landscape. Why he does not refer to Schloen's *The House of the Father* (2001) is somewhat peculiar, however.

In a stimulating paper, which is, granted, more of an intellectual exercise, Dimitri Nakassis uses the Lévi-Straussian notion of *Houses* as estates or social actors to explore their potential presence in the palatial communities of the Mycenaean world of mainland Greece, i.e. within a state structure (123-140). He recognises them in several residential units that are characterised by their large-scale and obvious references to the past and ancestors, but also in clusters of individual tombs in specific burial plots. He then compares this evidence with textual information that can be interpreted along similar lines, including the terms *oikos* and *dō*. It is evidently with regard to the 'collectors', a class of people that had significant households with various interests, some in dispersed locations, who may have been the head of large and wealthy *Houses*. Since some of the names of these 'collectors' are attested at various moments in distant centres, some hypothetical *Houses* may have been widespread and enduring.

Next, there is a detailed comparative discussion on Early Bronze Age princely burials of the Únětice culture in Central Germany by Harald Meller. The presence of older objects in these tombs suggests that intentional links were maintained with earlier Bell Beaker and Corder Ware traditions in a strategy of legitimation (141-163). He also discusses weapon hoards that allow the reconstruction of military hierarchies and connects these as well as the burials with the impressive longhouses that have excavated.

The focus of the volume then moves to Central and South America with three papers. Linda R. Manzanilla comes back to the idea that distinct neighbourhoods in Teotihuacan acted as independent units that can be categorised as *Houses* in the Lévi-Straussian sense (164-179) while James L. Fitzsimmons investigates the epigraphic evidence for house societies in the Classic Maya, proposing new interpretations for some well-known terms such as *ch'een* and *nim-ja* and emblem glyphs (180-184). Coastal Peru and the Salinar settlements (esp. Caylán) are treated in a paper by David Chicoine and Jacob Warner (195-217). They use Delanda's assemblage theory to analyse monumental building projects and their various entanglements. As such, the Main Mound Complex at Caylán is seen as the outcome of a supra-communal project that resulted from inter-*House* competition (*cercadura*). The latter counted smaller platforms comprising ritualised curated fills.

The following two papers treat two different African regions but with different scales and perspectives. While the first paper by Carlos Magnavita and Scott MacEachern applies a top-down perspective, discussing state formation in the Lake Chad region on the borders of Niger, Nigeria, and Chad (218-239), the paper by Stephen Dueppen takes a bottom-up view on the development in Burkina Faso (240-258). In the mid-1st millennium, large, fortified villages appeared in Chad, following a seemingly indigenous process. While these stood at the head of a hierarchical settlement pattern, by AD 300-500, this hierarchy was replaced by politically autonomous self-reliant nucleated peer communities. This was probably a defensive mechanism against an outside threat. Contacts with the outside, however, were limited before AD 700 after which a non-urban state-level stratified Zaghawa society appeared at Kanem-Borno. From the 15th c. AD onwards, large fortified urban centres appeared in the Kanem-Borno area such as at Gazargamo and Kukawa, where slave trade was an important element of the economy. In the southern Chad, however, a state-level society with polities based in several fortified urban centres started earlier. These city-states were independent peer-polities and may have originated from defensive coalescence processes following their being the target of Kanem-Borno slave traders. While elsewhere in Africa, urbanisation appears before the emergence of the state, this seems not the case in Chad. In a very structured and detailed analysis, Stephen Dueppen explores social dynamics in central West Africa, focussing on the role of both distributed and co-residential multi-family houses in inland Burkina Faso and coastal, concentrated communities. It illustrates the variety

of social systems within a single geographical zone, but also how dispersed multi-family houses were autonomous political and economic actors that gradually formed village communities in which they maintained a strong house identity. By the 12th c. AD, however, stronger collective identities developed through interdependency at the local level, retaining a decentralised political system.

We then return to Europe with a paper by Julio Escalona who investigates two early medieval secondary state formations in Mercia and Castile (259-279). He too stresses the inadequacy of linear evolutionary theories in state formation, and argues that, besides their different historical and environmental contexts, the two regions share certain similarities and comply with similar socio-political processes This is especially true for the coalescence processes of land acquisition or strongholds by elite members, on the one hand, and upscaling on the other. The final paper is on the 'sea people' by Bérénice Bellina's, but not those of the Mediterranean but of Southeast Asia (280-301). She shows how 'ahistorical' highly mobile groups played a prominent role, both in economics and politics, and were highly interconnected with land-based trading polities between the 15th and 19th c. AD. She argues for the inappropriateness of the Western model of the state for Southeast Asia, where power was not based on territorial control but on the creation and maintenance of interdependent networks. Instead, two political models are prioritised. The Mandala model entails a confederation of political entities subordinated to a dominant centre, while the hierarchic upstream-downstream Dendritic river model implies the existence of a central place, located downstream, that controlled the flux or goods entering a river basin system with ties to upstream centres of less order. It is especially (but not only) in this second model that sea nomadism is considered, long-distance sailing groups on the one hand, and estuarine and riverine groups, on the other. These sea-nomads maintained trade networks, essential for the proper functioning of land-based communities. Although concerned with Southeast Asia, I could not help making connections with the Bronze Age Aegean where similar conditions may have prevailed.

All by all, a very instructive volume. An index, however, would have been welcome and perhaps some kind of summarising ideas since despite the great variety of cultures treated, certain constancies in agency are clearly recognisable.

Jan Driessen
University of Cincinatti
jan.driessen@uclouvain.be

Michael. L Galaty, Lorenc Bejko (eds) *Archaeological investigations in a northern Albanian province. Results of the Projekti Arkeologjik i Shkodrës* (Memoirs of the Museum of Anthropology 64). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2023. *Volume 1: Survey and excavations results*. pp. 309, 160 col. ill. 33 tab. ISBN 978-1-951538-73-6, hardcover $85.00; ISBN 978-1-951538-68-2, ebook $85.00; Volume 2: Artifacts and Artifact analysis. pp. 457, 67 plates, 132 col. ill. 100 tab. ISBN 978-1-951538-69-9, harcover $85.00, ISBN 978-1-951538-67-5, ebook $85.00.

This two-volume monograph presents the results of a multidisciplinary regional archaeological project in the Upper Shkodër Basin, in North Albania. Importantly, PASH, the Albanian acronym for this project, continues the series of regional archaeological projects in Albania, initiated over two decades ago with the Albanian-American collaboration in the hinterlands of Apollonia and Dyrrhachium, the Mallakastra Regional Archaeological Project, or MRAP and the Durrës Regional Archaeological Project, or DRAP. It is all the more pleasing to see the integral results of PASH published in a single, richly illustrated edition and the project data made freely accessible at the Deep Blue data repository. This is entirely in tune with recent calls for data transparency and the need to publish, curate and preserve archaeological datasets. Wittingly or not, PASH also complements the earlier regional projects in Albania, both of which were focused on the hinterlands of the two Corinthian-Corcyran colonies on the Albanian coast, whereas PASH studies the developments in the territory of an autochthonous, Illyrian centre, in a little-known corner of the Balkan Peninsula. Shkodër, ancient Scodra, was the last seat of the Illyrian kings prior to the Roman conquest and, until the early 20th century, it kept its role as a major regional centre, on par with Prizren, Sarajevo, Skopje or Niš. In view of the principal goals of this research project, the study of the causes and mechanisms of emergent social inequality and complexity, the Shkodër Basin is a well-chosen setting.

The sheer size of this monograph and the numerous highly-specialized contributions are prohibitive of a detailed, chapter-by-chapter review. Therefore, the brief overview of the contents of these two volumes will be followed by a series of critical observations and a summary of the most important findings of