3 Defining 'Early Civilization'

Identifying early civilizations for comparative study requires ascertaining the general features that distinguish them from both simpler and more complex societies. Such criteria do not constitute an 'ideal type', which, according to Max Weber (1949), seeks to order reality by selecting and accentuating certain elements of it. Instead, they identify a natural but not necessarily exclusive category within which it is possible to conduct a more detailed study of differences and similarities. Nevertheless, even postulating such a category as 'early civilizations' attracts charges of subjectivity and ethnocentric bias. Do early civilizations constitute a natural class that is susceptible to the kind of comparative study I am proposing? Does degree of complexity have any real meaning? Is it possible to measure complexity objectively? Do not fundamental historical differences render all societies inappropriate for comparative analysis? Extreme relativists would answer the last question with a resounding yes.

'Early civilization' is undeniably an evolutionary concept. It assumes the existence of less complex societies, some of which evolved into early civilizations, and more complex ones, which either developed out of early civilizations or grew up alongside of and ultimately replaced them. The aim of my research is not to evaluate the concept of sociocultural evolution (but see Trigger 1998a) or to try to account for how and why early civilizations developed. Yet, in order to demonstrate that the societies I am examining are at the same level or stage of development, it is necessary to argue that sociocultural evolution is a valid scientific concept.

SOCIOCULTURAL EVOLUTION

The idea of social evolution has been violently attacked in recent decades as a myth created by Western European scholars, beginning in the eighteenth century, to justify colonial exploitation in many parts of the world (Diamond 1974;

Patterson 1997; Rowlands 1989). Although there is much truth to this charge, I reject the suggestion that the idea of evolution as an approach to the study of human history is inherently and inescapably colonialist and racist. Archaeological research inspired by an evolutionary perspective has demonstrated the creativity of indigenous peoples around the world and the progress they achieved in prehistoric times, and growing knowledge of these achievements has played a significant role in undermining the justifications offered for colonialism and assisted independence movements.

Uso da arqueologia para demonstrar a evolução das sociedades e sua complexidade em relação às demais.

Extreme relativists also object that the concept of cultural evolution attributes a spurious linearity and regularity to cultural change. It is only, they argue, by rejecting evidence that does not conform to expectations – that is, by imposing a false pattern on human history – that evolutionists have been able to suggest such regularity (Giddens 1984: 236; 1985). Cultural evolutionary explanations are denounced for their reliance on ecologically deterministic explanations of culture change. This, it is maintained, denies the importance of ideas in guiding human behaviour and the role of individual preferences and contingent events in shaping human history. Very little attention is paid by these critics to the role that relativists assign to cultural traditions as factors restricting or inhibiting individual choice. Evolutionary approaches are viewed as materialist attempts to deny the diversity of human behaviour and the capacity of culturally mediated ideas to create still more diversity.

A visão evolucionista, segundo o autor, é crítica por não levar em consideração a diversidade cultural e buscar padrões que demonstram sua teoria.

It has been demonstrated archaeologically that all modern societies are descended from Upper Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer bands and these in turn from still earlier scavenging societies. Along the way, societies that abandoned hunter-gatherer economies experienced major changes in social organization and understandings of the universe and the place of humans in it. As knowledge of the past has increased, many concepts formerly associated with evolutionary theory have been recognized as erroneous and abandoned. A teleological view of sociocultural evolution has been slowly but remorselessly discarded. Evolutionary specialists no longer claim that a specific trajectory is inherent in sociocultural evolution and shapes human behaviour independently of human will. Such views are now summarily dismissed as 'God-surrogates' (Gellner 1988: 144) intended to preserve a belief that human history was the unfolding of some predetermined plan at a time when faith in divine providence was yielding to a more secular outlook. Today it is recognized that change is neither more nor less normal than stasis, that most innovation tends to promote random or multilinear rather than orthogenetic cultural change, that cultural change occurs for many different reasons and in highly contingent ways, and that, because of this, it is not predictable in specific instances. It is also recognized that greater social complexity is not necessarily accompanied

O autor cita situações em que a ideia de sociedade complexa está de alguma forma presente.

by an increase in human happiness and that the concept of progress is a purely subjective one that has no place in scientific discourse.

In spite of this, a strong tendency has been noted for sociocultural change to move in the general direction of greater complexity. This results from the greater capacity of more complex societies to compete successfully with less complex ones for control of territory and other resources. As a result of such competition, in all but the poorest and most marginal environments (and increasingly even in these) smaller-scale societies must either acquire the key attributes of more complex societies or be displaced or absorbed by them. Convergence of this sort occurs far more readily in human societies than among other animal species because of the unique degree to which human behaviour is learned. As small-scale societies are deprived of resources and become less able to maintain a satisfactory lifestyle, many individuals in such societies adopt new forms of behaviour either to survive or because they are positively attracted by more successful ways of doing things. It is the short-term competitive advantages of societies that determine their relative viability. Small-scale hunter-gatherer societies may as a type possess greater long-term viability than industrial societies, but in direct competition it is the industrial societies that prevail (Trigger 1998a: 170–77). Increasing complexity also appears to foster a more scientific understanding of the material world and of human behaviour, as well as the development of higher levels of both social and self-control (Elias 1978; 1982). These attributes also appear to have a selective advantage.

Thus cultural selection provides a general direction to cultural change that justifies attempts to identify various stages in the development of greater cultural complexity, including early civilizations. This does not mean that all societies evolve along a single trajectory to a common future or that cross-cultural differences are less important than similarities. Unlike nineteenth-century evolutionists, who posited the successive development of specific types of society, cultural selectionists allow for the development and survival of many different sorts of societies in particular social and natural settings (Yoffee 1993). Any form of cultural evolutionism that seeks to account only for sociocultural regularities is bound to be scientifically inadequate. In order not to mask variability and bias their conclusions, anthropologists who employ an evolutionary perspective must pay as much attention to cultural differences as they do to cultural similarities. They must accept the possibility that features common to a particular stage or level of social complexity may be few by comparison with dissimilar ones. They also must determine empirically to what extent early civilizations or any other types of society were or were not clearly distinguished from other types.

DEFINING 'EARLY CIVILIZATION'

Unilinear evolutionists in the nineteenth century and more recently neoevolutionists believed that all societies at the same stage of development were very similar. Societies could therefore be assigned to a particular stage on the basis of a small number of distinctive criteria or even a single trait. In the past, civilization was often equated with the presence of writing, on the ground that the ability to record speech made possible new forms of innovation, commerce, and understanding (Morgan 1907 [1877]: 12). Yet this association cannot be sustained any more than any other attempt to define early civilizations in terms of specific items of material culture. In Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, and among the Maya, scripts that could be used to record speech were invented at a relatively early period. In highland Mexico, Peru, and West Africa recording devices of this sort did not develop. Yet there is no perceptible difference in the overall degree of social, economic, and political complexity reached by early civilizations that utilized writing and those that did not.

Para o autor o uso da escrita não pode ser um definidor de estágio já que várias sociedades, de diferentes partes, tiveram um tipo de escrita, porém seu desenvolvimento cultural era bem diferente. O fato de ter escrita não permite que sejam agrupadas como mais complexas.

The situation is not improved by employing longer trait lists. Childe (1950) attempted to distinguish the earliest cities, and by implication early civilizations, from Neolithic villages in terms of ten criteria: (1) large urban centres, (2) craft workers, merchants, officials, and priests supported by the surpluses produced by farmers, (3) primary producers paying surpluses to a deity or divine ruler, (4) monumental architecture, (5) a ruling class exempt from manual labour, (6) systems for recording information, (7) the development of exact practical sciences, (8) monumental art, (9) the regular importation of raw materials both as luxuries and as industrial materials, and (10) resident specialist craft workers politically as well as economically under the control of secular or religious officials. Charles Maisels (1999: 25–27) has pointed out that Childe's final point is composed of three separate criteria: (10) peasants, craftsmen, and rulers form a community, (11) the social solidarity of the community is represented (or misrepresented) by the preeminence of temples and funerary cults, and (12) a state organization is dominant and permanent. Childe clearly believed that these features had evolved in a coevolutionary fashion and were all present in any social system that had reached a certain level of complexity. His definition of early civilization resembled the trait lists that were still used in the 1950s to define archaeological cultures. Such listings of features were later used by evolutionary anthropologists to delineate stages of cultural development.

One problem with such enumerative definitions is that even small disagreements about how specific criteria are defined or interpreted affect what societies are assigned to a particular category. In his effort to produce a

general characterization of early civilizations, Childe defined terms such as 'city', 'monumental architecture', 'systems of recording', and 'exact sciences' in a loose or abstract rather than an operational manner. Cities in fact differed considerably in size, layout, and function in early civilizations, and scholars who used highly specific definitions of urbanism maintained that some civilizations, such as those of ancient Egypt and the Maya, lacked them (J. Thompson 1970; J. Wilson 1960); yet no anthropologist was prepared on that account to deny these two particular literate societies the status of civilizations. At the same time, the highly urbanized Yoruba have often been denied the status of a civilization or of having 'cities' rather than 'towns' because they were non-literate (Sjoberg 1960). The Shang Chinese occasionally have been described as a 'chiefdom' or 'prestate society', but those who did so never denied that they constituted a 'civilization' (Treistman 1972: 130). Each early civilization was the result of individual historical processes that produced distinctive material and institutional expressions. Such complex entities cannot usefully be defined by establishing a monothetic set of specific attributes that each of them must possess.

Ao invés do uso de categorias restritas proposta por Childe (parágrafo anterior) o autor sugere o uso de termos mais gerais.

Buscar compreender o quanto um termo está imbricado na sociedade?

A useful characterization of early civilizations must instead be framed in terms of the general sorts of social, economic, and political institutions and the associated types of knowledge and beliefs that were required for societies of that degree of complexity to function. Behaviour is accorded priority not because material culture, especially technology, was unimportant but because it was embedded in society. Technology, settlement patterns, art, and architecture can be understood only in terms of the roles they played in materially supporting such institutions, facilitating social interaction, and promoting the ideological objectives of various segments of society. Cross-cultural regularities in beliefs and values must be interpreted in relation to the social conditions that produced them. A useful definition must therefore be constructed within a social anthropological framework. In the following sections, I will survey the common features that anthropologists have attributed to early civilizations in recent decades and determine how these general features differ from those associated with more and less complex societies.

Anthropologists apply the term 'early civilization' to the earliest and simplest forms of societies in which the basic principle governing social relations was not kinship but a hierarchy of social divisions that cut horizontally across societies and were unequal in power, wealth, and social prestige. In these societies a tiny ruling group that used coercive powers to augment its authority was sustained by agricultural surpluses and labour systematically appropriated from a much larger number of agricultural producers. Full-time specialists (artisans, bureaucrats, soldiers, retainers) also supported and served the ruling

group and the goverment apparatus it controlled. Rulers cultivated a luxurious style of life that distinguished them from the ruled.

The horizontal divisions found in these societies are usually termed 'classes'. Classes are distinguished by their generality from more specific interest groups, based on common cultural, ethnic, religious, regional, or occupational affinities, that unite to pursue their members' specialized objectives. They are fewer, usually last longer, cut across entire societies, and influence virtually every aspect of their members' lives. Patricia Crone (1989: 101–2) maintains, however, that no preindustrial society had classes because, in contrast to the working classes in industrial societies, farmers, who constituted the majority of people in preindustrial societies, could not easily develop common goals beyond the local level and were therefore unable to unite as a group to pursue their economic interests in opposition to the ruling stratum. Crone argues that, because of this, preindustrial societies may have been horizontally divided into strata, ranks, or orders but not into classes. She thus equates the term 'class' with what some Marxists call 'classes for themselves', by which they mean social orders that are not only aware of themselves but also united in the pursuit of common political goals (Terray 1975). She also maintains that in preindustrial societies wealth was mainly determined by status, whereas in more rapidly changing and vertically mobile industrial societies class membership tends to be determined principally by wealth. The close association between wealth and class in industrial societies reflects the high degree of vertical mobility that results from the economic expansion and rapid social change that are inherent in capitalist societies.

Problemática do uso de classes para as sociedades pré-industrial.

Crone is not alone in recognizing that social scientists must choose between a broad definition of 'class' that can be applied to all varieties of complex societies, taking account of the different forms that it assumes in different types, and a definition that would restrict 'class' to modern industrial societies. The latter sort of definition treats preindustrial societies as having different kinds of stratification that arise from factors other than owning capital or the means of production (Bottomore 1974: 953). Historical usage both supports and undermines Crone's usage. While the term 'class' (*classis*) was an ancient Roman one, it came to be widely used only in modern Europe in the early nineteenth century, replacing earlier terms such as 'rank' and 'order', to denote hierarchical divisions that were increasingly being defined in economic terms. Nevertheless, the Romans used the term 'class' to designate the division of their society into formal orders based on personal wealth, which in turn defined individual and family rights and responsibilities in relation to the Roman state. This indicates that classes, even as narrowly defined by Crone, existed in some preindustrial societies.

Yet I agree that the terminological issue she has raised is not trivial – that farmers had difficulty in organizing for broadly based social action in preindustrial societies and that in these societies wealth tended to be derived from political power far more frequently than political power was derived from wealth. There is also evidence that in early civilizations major social divisions were perceived very differently from the way we regard them; the members of different social strata were sometimes assigned separate supernatural origins and different roles that were considered in accord with a divine plan. Every complex society had its own particular view of the nature, origin, and roles of its social strata. Crone's argument raises the possibility that different terms might profitably be employed to designate social hierarchies in industrial and preindustrial societies.

At the same time, while the roles played by wealth, power, prestige, education, and manners in acquiring membership in particular societal levels can vary greatly from one society to another, it appears that in all complex societies there is a strong correlation between wealth, power, and prestige. This suggests that similar concerns drive the development of and sustain horizontal divisions in all complex societies, even if the basic ways in which these divisions develop and maintain themselves change as societies increase in scale and complexity. Material concerns are not absent at any level, and economic and political motives appear inextricable regardless of how they are pursued. Even if farmers were unable to unite as a single group to achieve their political goals in early civilizations, they were as aware of the social hierarchy and of their place in it as members of the ruling group. Such knowledge played a major role in ordering individual behaviour in early civilizations and sometimes resulted in political action in the form of farmers' revolts or workers' demonstrations. Thus farmers constituted *de facto* 'classes in themselves' even if they did not constitute 'classes for themselves', and I am prepared to use the term 'class' as a cross-cultural label for the major hierarchical divisions found in early civilizations. 'Early civilization' can thus be summarily defined as the earliest and simplest form of *class-based* society.

Para o autor, o fato dos mais simples terem noção de hierarquia, de ter uma pessoa que comanda, permite o uso do termo CLASSE mesmo que eles não tenham a consciência de pertencer a um grupo, a uma classe.

EARLY STATES AND EARLY CIVILIZATIONS

Early civilizations were not the first societies to be divided into classes. Small-scale societies such as the sedentary, food-collecting Tlingit and Kwakiutl peoples of coastal British Columbia or the agricultural Kayan of Borneo were held together by kinship relations, and their leaders depended on public opinion for such support as was at their disposal, but they were divided into at least three hereditary strata or classes: chiefs or nobles, commoners, and slaves

(Donald 1997; Rousseau 1990; 2001). Early states such as Buganda, the Zulu kingdom in southern Africa, early historical Hawaii, and the seventeenth-century Powhatan polity in Virginia consisted of several thousand to several hundred thousand people, living in kinship-based communities or small chiefdoms held together by rulers who regularly used force to maintain their authority. The core of such an early state (or complex chiefdom) was an ethnic group, tribe, or ruler's kindred to which other groups willingly or unwillingly paid tribute. This tribute supported a higher standard of living for the core group, which was entirely or partly freed from agricultural labour, giving its members more time to carry out administrative tasks and suppress rebellions. Political control was based on patron-client relations, and the success of a polity depended largely on the personal qualities of its paramount leader (Earle 1991; Price and Feinman 1995; Upham 1990). Borders fluctuated and cores fragmented when political leadership failed. While the ruling group's lifestyle was more luxurious than commoners', the gap between these two groups was less marked than it was in early civilizations. These rudimentary classes were superimposed on hierarchically structured kinship networks or ethnic groups, with kinship remaining the basis of sociopolitical organization.

In early civilizations, in contrast, class displaced kinship and ethnicity as the main organizing principle of society. While kinship remained important at the local level and in reinforcing relations among the upper classes, endogamous classes allocated rights and responsibilities and protected the interests of a privileged minority. Power was based primarily on the control of agricultural surpluses, which the upper classes extracted in various ways from the rest of the population. While the technology remained simple, the organization and management of human labour sometimes became quite complex. Authoritative power in the form of institutionalized administrative positions replaced the more informal patron-client relations found in early states. Each state was administered by multiple levels of officials who were able to mobilize the entire population for defence and public works and provided the political security that allowed farmers to prosper and increase in numbers. Governments were sufficiently stable to endure over many generations. There was more strategic and symbolic emphasis than in early states on controlling territory; borders tended to be more clearly defined and guarded. This and the increased importance of class resulted in more restricted roles for kinship and ethnicity than at earlier stages of political development.

Central governments possessed ultimate control over justice and the use of force. The ruling class was able to exert various forms of coercion, but demands for the production of surpluses, corvée labour, and mandatory military

service were kept at a relatively low level, and officials often reciprocated for such work with food and entertainment. Although most early civilizations had slavery, it was less extensive and oppressive than in many later preindustrial societies. The scale and productivity of early civilizations nevertheless permitted the upper classes to extract sufficient surpluses to support a markedly more elaborate lifestyle than that enjoyed by the lower classes or by anyone in less complex societies and to create monumental art and architecture that required a wide range of raw materials, highly skilled craftspeople, and professional planners and administrators. These creations became symbols of their power and leadership ability.

The upper classes claimed privileged relations with the supernatural, and rulers frequently were ascribed divine or semidivine status. Just as class had replaced both real and metaphorical kinship as a basis for organizing societies, so religious concepts replaced kinship as a medium for social and political discourse (Sahlins 1976: 211–12). There is little evidence that such issues were formulated in terms of explicitly political or economic concepts; this would have been especially difficult where paramount rulers claimed absolute and divinely sanctioned authority. As had been the case in less complex societies, religious concepts did not differentiate clearly between what we regard as the social, natural, and supernatural realms. Yet, despite a general tendency to view nature as animated by supernatural power and able to understand and respond to human entreaty, there is abundant evidence that the people who lived in early civilizations, like all other human beings, clearly understood the relation between cause and effect in their everyday dealings with the natural world. They were also keenly aware of self-interest and how it could be most effectively pursued in the social realm.

LATER PREINDUSTRIAL CIVILIZATIONS

Later preindustrial civilizations, what Talcott Parsons called 'Advanced Intermediate' societies as opposed to 'Archaic' ones (Sanderson 1990: 110), developed either directly from early civilizations or as secondary civilizations on the borders of early ones that they eventually dominated and transformed. Among them were the Assyrian and Persian Empires, Classical Greece, Republican and Imperial Rome, Mauryan India, Han Dynasty China, and the feudal and mercantile states found in Europe, Japan, and elsewhere in medieval and early modern times. These societies were organized either as city-states or regional states, with the latter tending to predominate. One of the key features that distinguished these societies from early civilizations was the widespread use of money, usually in the form of metal coins, to facilitate

exchange and store wealth. The mass production of coins of small value, often made of copper, incorporated low-wage earners more deeply into market and wage economies. This was associated with the growing diversification of economies and the increasing importance of production, exchange, and financial services as sources of income (Heichelheim 1958: 251–54). Even in feudal societies, where a non-commercial form of landholding was associated with political power, money played an increasingly important role in facilitating the accumulation of wealth. In Western Europe this process led to the rise of capitalism (Braudel 1982; Wallerstein 1974). Money also served as a common denominator for calculating an individual's total assets, and this made it possible for the abstract concept of wealth to replace control of land or crop surpluses as a measure of position and status. A common measure of wealth also made it easier for an increasing number of individuals to invest in a variety of economic activities.

In many later preindustrial civilizations, military forces were more numerous, specialized, and institutionally distinguished from the state and from society in general. In early civilizations full-time soldiers tended to be few and to be led by kings, government officials, and local authorities. As military technology and tactics grew more complex, professional armies were created that were commanded by career officers. When the civil administration of the Roman Empire declined, generals used the disciplined and still well-financed military power at their disposal to override civil authorities and compete with one another for imperial office. In all societies where armed forces became institutionally distinct from the government, controlling the military became a growing source of concern for government officials (Mann 1986: 163–67).

Whereas in early civilizations supernatural powers were regarded as inherent in nature, in the course of the first millennium B.C. in Greece and parts of the Middle East, India, and China, the natural world became increasingly desacralized. Instead of being regarded as animated by supernatural energy, which endowed trees, rocks, and stars with reason, emotions, and will, as well as power, the physical universe came to be viewed as inanimate and plants and animals as lacking the reason and insight possessed by human beings. The world and the things in it became entities that human beings might try to understand through observation and thereby control more effectively.

This new understanding meant that the natural, social, and supernatural realms were for the first time explicitly distinguished from one another. The realization that the natural and social realms needed to be understood in different ways encouraged the development of new and more aggressive forms of enquiry into the nature of things. Some philosophers denied the existence of the supernatural altogether; others regarded the supernatural realm as

remote and largely irrelevant for everyday human affairs. Most people, however, viewed deities as increasingly transcendent: human beings and the world depended on the gods for their creation and survival, but the gods were not believed to depend upon any aspect of their creation. New international religions, such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, stressed individualism and the difference between the real and the ideal. Instead of being identified with a particular state or civilization, these new religions claimed to be relevant for all human beings, and they promised personal salvation to all who believed their teachings and were prepared to live as they prescribed. Even those forms of Judaism which rejected proselytization regarded their god as the ruler of all peoples and places (Eisenstadt 1986; Gellner 1988). Religious loyalties thus extended over much broader areas than political and ethnic ties or than religious systems had done in early civilizations. Communities of believers in international religions played a major role in facilitating international trade and communication in a world in which production and exchange networks were becoming increasingly important and extensive (Mann 1986: 363–71).

These views affected political life. Old rituals in which monarchs mediated between the human and the supernatural realms persisted in some later preindustrial civilizations, but the conceptual separation of the natural, social, and supernatural realms promoted a view of kings as humans who at most received divine protection. The sacral kingship associated with early civilizations was replaced by diverse forms of government. Democracies, oligarchies, tyrannies, and military dictatorships flourished alongside both limited and absolute monarchies. Power increasingly depended on the ability of rulers to use military force to maintain high levels of agricultural productivity and sustain the bureaucracies that collected the revenues required to meet the state's expenses. The increasing power of the state meant that in some societies the prevalence of slavery and the exploitation of the poor reached higher levels than before.

While later preindustrial civilizations varied in scale and in economic, political, and ideological organization, they tended to be more powerful than early civilizations and better adapted to the transsocietal division of labour that characterized an *oecumene* stretching from Europe to East Asia. Ancient Egypt lost its political independence and then its distinctive political and religious institutions as it was absorbed successively into the late Roman and then the Islamic cultural sphere. Mesopotamian culture lost its distinctive characteristics following its incorporation into the Hellenistic world. In northern China the transition was internal and more gradual and did not involve such a spectacular break with the past, but it too came

about as the result of centuries of competition among rival states. The disappearance of the distinctive features of early civilizations is evidence of their inability to compete with the institutions that characterized later preindustrial civilizations (Crone 1989; Gellner 1988; Hall 1986; Mann 1986).

In sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas, no indigenous societies had evolved beyond the level of early civilizations by the time of European contact. One possible exception was the Postclassic Maya (A.D. 900–1530), who built palaces and temples on a more modest scale than the Classic Maya and more structures serving public functions. Kings appear to have been less revered than previously, and at least one major centre, Chichen Itza, had a *multepal*, or joint government of nobles (Schele and Freidel 1990: 361). Maya art of the Postclassic period emphasized communal and social themes rather than the royal ones that had predominated during the Classic period. There is, however, no evidence of major changes in religious beliefs or other aspects of their social organization. It may be that what looks like an incipient development beyond the level of early civilization merely reflected highland Mesoamerican influences on the Maya of that period.

The Spanish conquests of Mexico and Peru were assisted by a smallpox pandemic that killed a vast number of indigenous people, and the subsequent consolidation of these conquests was aided by many epidemics of European diseases against which local peoples lacked immunity. Yet the rapid subjugation of Mexico and Peru, as well as the scarcely opposed British conquest of Benin, were a consequence not merely of superior European military technology but also of superior organization, discipline, and self-discipline and more aggressive ideologies, both religious and secular. These momentous events constitute further evidence of the superior organizational (but not ethical) achievements of later preindustrial and industrial civilizations.

ASIATIC SOCIETIES

The concept of 'Asiatic society' or the 'Asiatic mode of production' was prominent in discussions of early civilizations during the 1970s and 1980s, when Marxism briefly played a significant role in theoretical debates among anthropologists. Karl Marx (1964) had postulated that the traditional state structures of India and China consisted of egalitarian farming villages based on collective landholding that were dominated and taxed by a military elite. While the regional government structures created by this elite rose and fell as a consequence of military competition, farming villages remained unchanged over long periods. Marx viewed these arrangements as a primitive form of class society but one which, as a result of the village self-sufficiency on which it