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*Coercion, Violence, and
Inequality in Archaeological
Perspective*

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Interest in the study of inequality and its dynamics
is currently at a high ebb within a number of aca-
demic disciplines. Trends in academic research are
often driven or inspired by pressing issues confronting
humanity, and the recent crop of studies on inequal-
ity is clearly no different, as global concern with rising
inequality is increasingly prominent in public discourse.
Articles and collected volumes addressing questions
pertaining to the rise and fall of inequality in human
societies by historians (e.g., Lindert and Williamson
2016; Scheidel 2017; Scott 2017; Levitt 2019), philoso-
phers (e.g., Blake 2011), social scientists (e.g., Beenstock
2012; Atkinson 2015; Boix 2015), anthropologists (e.g.,
Willführ and Störmer 2015; Mattison et al. 2016; papers
in Kohler and Smith 2018), and archaeologists (e.g.,
Chapman 2008; Campbell 2014; Houk 2017; Porčić
2018; Fochesato, Bogaard, and Bowles 2019) are multi-
plying rapidly. The purpose of this collection of papers
is to build upon and engage with this scholarship and
the interest that it has generated among academics and
the general public. While far from unique in focus-
ing on inequality, this volume is distinct from existing
studies. First, the papers here focus especially on pre-
historic archaeology, as opposed to most extant work,
which deals mainly or exclusively with societies that
have left behind substantial textual records. Second,
rather than focusing on a particular region or time
period, this volume embraces a widely comparativist
perspective. Third, the papers in this collection break

new ground by embedding detailed archaeological case studies within strong theoretical frameworks.

Space exists for many voices, perspectives, and areas of focus in archaeological research on inequality. The papers in this volume center on the relationship between violence and inequality. The rationale behind this focus relates to both the complicated role that violence plays in recent influential scholarly work on the dynamics of human inequality, and the promise that archaeological approaches hold for robust engagement with questions that conclusions resulting from such recent work pose for the material record. Many archaeologists, historians, and anthropologists—scholars within disciplines concerned with *longue durée* accounts of the emergence of complex societies and formalized inequality—have tended to assume that violence and its threat buttressed elite social control. This is now challenged from various perspectives, not least recent major work in economics that suggests that large-scale violence in fact depresses and erodes emergent wealth inequalities.

We have thus arrived at a critical moment for scholars concerned with the evolution of the state. What role did coercive violence play in trajectories toward complexity? How can we trace levels and types of violence alongside emerging wealth disparities? Can we generalize about the social role of violence, or must we necessarily retreat to the specific? This volume nuances prehistoric archaeological understanding of the dynamic relationship between coercion, aggression, and the state, offering an original deep history of violence and inequality. Rather than aiming at grand overviews or easy generalizations, we focus on specific evidence for relationships between coercive force and unequal distribution of resources, which complicate and often undermine the simple and sweeping conclusions that have taken strong root among historians and policy-makers.

In sum, violence and its threat, in their capacity to reinforce or transform, are now a central preoccupation in the social sciences and humanities. Archaeology, as the discipline with the longitudinal focus necessary to model long-term social evolution, rapidly needs to incorporate and synthesize emergent models of social violence. This volume, then, in advancing the prehistoric archaeology of social and coercive violence, fills a critical lacuna in the scholarly landscape at a critical juncture.

The papers in the volume interrogate the archaeological record in dialogue with diverse intellectual trajectories about relationships between violence and inequality. Although the present volume is organized and written by archaeologists, work by economic and political historians and anthropologists has also been a major source of our inspiration in conceiving and carrying out the underlying research project, and so we review perspectives from both archaeological

and historical disciplinary literatures in this introduction. In our view, the literature can be divided conceptually between scholarship linking violence explicitly to the buttressing of state power and its inequities, and alternative perspectives according to which violence intersects variously with states and inequality, often undermining rather than supporting both. We summarize the implications of and complications within existing scholarship, as a background to the volume, before moving on to consider the potential contribution that prehistoric archaeologists might make in understanding the relevant evidence. Finally, we close with a description of the volume's structure and implications.

WAR MAKES STATES, STATES MAKE WAR (AND SOMETIMES PEACE)

Discussions of inequality almost inevitably entail consideration of political structure and social complexity, insofar as consistently unequal access to material and social goods among community members is usually related to differential distributions of power, a resource that is determined by political structure (Price and Feinman 2010, 2). Most scholars agree that inequality increases as political structures become more complex (e.g., Mattison et al. 2016). Ultimately, the existence of violence presupposes a hierarchical distribution of power and access to resources, because people wielding violence possess a form of power and extend that power to deny certain physical freedoms to others. It is therefore widely understood that there is a close connection between systemic inequality in terms of resource distribution; the formation of the complex, hierarchical political entities that we generally call states; and incidence of interpersonal and institutional violence.

Historians have long interrogated the role of violence, or the threat of violence, in the development of complex states. Violence—its actualization or implication—has generally been reconstructed as a vital mechanism by which social and wealth inequalities are built and maintained. The resulting power disparities reach their apogee in the modern nation-state, which is the current steward of rampant and growing economic inequalities that are deeply unsettling to many.

The anthropologist Robert Carneiro (1970, 1988) influentially advocated a model in which force provided the essentially unitary mechanism allowing a steady global progression from villages to states. Carneiro elucidated a discrete model of state origins, which he later called the circumscription theory. He argued that, given a subsistence economy and an environment in which productive agricultural land was tightly circumscribed, and presuming a growth

scenario in which population pressed upon carrying capacity, groups with a monopoly on violence would both conquer surrounding regions to relieve population pressure and coerce community members to increase marginal production, partly to generate surplus with which to pay taxes supporting the violence monopolizers. This process would result in a society divided between oppressed producers and violent rulers who were completely divorced from agricultural production (Carneiro 1970, 734–36). In Carneiro's view (1988, 505), "conquest warfare is the only demonstrated means in human history by which village autonomy has been systematically transcended and larger and larger political units established." Crucially, he takes for granted that no individual or group would ever willingly relinquish any level of autonomous control except under threat of violence.

This model of social violence, according to which structural, social, and economic inequalities in the premodern past almost always arose directly because of violence or its threat, was largely accepted by the historian Charles Tilly (1975, 1985, 1992, 2005), whose work has significantly shaped thinking on violence and inequality amongst European historians. While Tilly's work is quite complex on the topic of war and states, a central and widely cited tenet of his research bears a close resemblance to Carneiro's circumscription theory. According to Tilly, hostile environments in premodern Europe caused communities to turn to war-making as a necessary mechanism for territorial security. In this environment, community members with a monopoly on or preferential access to instruments of violence gained sufficient power to form static, hierarchical states that depended on coercive force for their legitimacy and, once developed, were optimized for making war. So, in Tilly's pithy truism, "war made the state and the state made war" (Tilly 1975, 42). This argument fits well with the model for Medieval and Early Modern Europe proposed by Norbert Elias, who argued that the warrior societies arising from feudal systems depended for their existence on a performative monopoly over violence (Elias 1994).

Elias and Tilly both noted that these coercive societies eventually became less violent internally, a conclusion that was expanded by Ian Morris beyond the development of European states. Morris's *War: What Is It Good For* (2014) places war in a functionalist global perspective. In it, Morris argues that, although war is dreadful in the short term, it serves a useful and ultimately beneficial purpose for human society, because it enables the consolidation of large, authoritative territorial states that govern considerable swaths of the global population. These states have a vested material interest in maintaining peace within their borders, because domestic peace ensures that productivity is high and that governing parties can collect maximal inputs from taxation. Notwithstanding their

self-interested pursuit of domestic peace, states continue to prepare for war, stockpiling military capabilities to ensure defense of the sovereign territory against external forces that would threaten internal prosperity.

This model resonates with many Western historians familiar with a strong contrast between the so-called Pax Romana, a period in ancient history characterized by the sprawling, stable Roman Empire and a concomitant absence of frequent warfare, and the Classical period of Greek history, characterized by small, constantly squabbling city-states, among which warfare was truly endemic. Morris's thesis contends, then, that Tilly's model was only partly right—war makes states, sure enough, but the purpose of states is not to make more war. Instead, and somewhat ironically, states built through war are deeply invested in keeping the peace. Large states might be rife with inequality, but people accept differential access to resources and power because a life of relative security and prosperity enabled by the presence of a state that claims a monopoly on coercive force is preferable to a Hobbesian dystopia where every man must fight for his own survival. Not to be outdone in pithy sayings, Morris (2014, 17–18) riffs on the former US president Ronald Reagan's dictum warning voters against the phrase "I'm from the government and I'm here to help," instead contending that the most terrifying words in the English language are "there is no government and I am here to kill you." Morris's view is tangentially supported by attempts to trace an inverse relationship between sum violence and complexity of sociopolitical organization over the very long term (e.g., Pinker 2011; see also Boix 2015, 10).

COERCION IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STATE-MAKING

These views of the dynamic relationship between violence, institutionalized inequality, and state-making can be traced more broadly across social-scientific disciplines. They derive in part from a Weberian and Foucauldian tradition. Weber ([1919] 2015) proposed that a central, animating principle of the state was its claim to and possession of a monopoly on violence, rendering non-state, individual violence as intrinsically illegitimate. The state is thus intrinsically and primarily violent, with this legitimization being its essential aim. The analyses of Foucault and Galtung developed Weber's conceptualization of state violence by emphasizing the extent to which it pervades state institutions and imaginaries; either via the corporality of judicial violence and the ultimate realization of the inscription of the state on the human body (Foucault 1975), or as "structural" violence—violence done to human agency by or within the apparatus and ideologies of the state (Galtung 1969; Farmer 2004).

As do the models used by Carneiro, Tilly, Morris, and Pinker, cultural anthropologies often emphasize the role of violence in the erection of unequal state hierarchies, while also stressing the potential evolutionary forces that lead the many to ultimately accept rather than push back against the increasing concentration of goods and power in the hands of the few. Although archaeologists have emphasized a variety of sociocultural, cognitive, and ecological factors that result in the emergence of states characterized by inequality, two general approaches to the rise of unequal state structures in the human past can be identified. In the first, violence and coercion form the main rationale by which elites gain power and form states. In the second, state formation is viewed according to neoevolutionary, functionalist logic, so that the elevation of some community members to elite status serves the interests of the community as a whole and the dominant classes are beneficial to rather than exclusively exploitative of the many.

A number of generalizing anthropological accounts of the emergence of complex polities understand internal and external violence as integral to processes of state formation (e.g., Carrasco 1999; Scott 2009; Turchin et al. 2013). These accounts of state-making and state-maintaining argue that violence is a cross-cultural tool, often residing in the hands of proto-urban and urban elites, for coercing, subduing, mobilizing, and potentially terrorizing (Gellner 1989, 154–55; Shennan 2002, 206–38; Kohler, VanBuskirk, and Ruscavage-Barz 2004; Stanish 2004; Blanton and Fargher 2008, 2009; Swenson 2014). For example, Boix (2015, 127–70, 252–55) examines the mechanisms that lead to state formation. Taking for granted that violence is a fundamental feature of human nature, he argues that once a community passes a certain population threshold, a state is necessary to control the normal human tendency to exploit others through any means available (Boix 2015, 4). Following earlier work by Olson (1993, 2000), Boix's model of state formation centers on the role of bandits, powerful actors who loot surplus goods from their neighbors. These bandits either leverage their excellence at wielding violence to form political entities in which they comprise the elite class, or instigate the formation of defensive political alliances against their predations, which themselves become states. Boix's bandits are motivated by the serendipitous success of members of the community who happen to experience outsized agricultural surplus, therefore providing an incentive to violent predation. Along the same lines, Hayden's ethnographic study of Mayan elites suggests that they not only take power by coercive means but continue to behave exploitatively once their sociopolitical position is established (Hayden and Gargett 1990; Hayden 2007, 247).

VOLUNTARISM IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STATE-MAKING

Other anthropologists have approached processes of state formation and the related emergence of inequality in more nuanced ways, especially concerning themselves with a fine-grained, community-level analysis of how egalitarian societies become hierarchical and unequal over time. Some of these studies have emphasized the deficiencies of attributing all state formation to coercive forces, focusing instead on the evolutionary and adaptive characteristics of states (e.g., Kaplan, Hooper, and Gurven 2009; Carballo 2013, 4). Along these lines, it is plausible to reconstruct a situation in which individuals who excel at military leadership are granted political power because it is in the interest of the security of the entire community (Webster 1975, 467). Thus, while humans may be programmed for interpersonal conflict, cooperation is often selected for, because cooperative groups that cede leadership to an individual with excellent war-making capabilities beat selfish groups who do not willingly do so (Turchin and Gavrilets 2009, 169). The tension between selfish and group-benefiting behavior may reward and therefore perpetuate the existence of inequality, as all individuals negotiate between selfish impulses toward aggressive behavior and the challenges confronting the groups with which their lot is embedded (Feinman 2013, 300). The truth presumably lies somewhere in a middle ground between these coercive and voluntaristic models. Some individuals or groups surely do seize power and resources by force, but they nevertheless must retain the good will of the majority by providing some degree of social good even as they maintain control over the legitimate use of violence (Hayden 2007, 248).

A view of inequality and violence from a nonadministrative, bottom-up perspective also emerges from work that draws on collective action theory. Within the archaeological and anthropological literature, collective action theory (e.g., Blanton and Fargher 2008; DeMarrais and Earle 2017) emphasizes the communal and collaborative aspects of state-making. Accordingly, scholars working in this vein circumvent a fixation on political authorities and the use of force to structure society, instead developing a set of methods that presume that cooperation lay behind the development of political structures in the past. This approach has value, especially, in that it allows us to resuscitate the majority of nonelite groups as actively engaged in their own world-building rather than as a "behaviorally inert subjugated class" (Blanton and Fargher 2008, 13). Furthermore, thinking through collective action theory obviates the need to reconstruct all humans as fundamentally gain-seeking and avaricious, more realistically assuming that humans are neither inherently selfish nor inherently cooperative, but behave differently according to

circumstances, the availability of information, and a variety of other factors. Collective action theory does not deny the presence of violence and inequality but rather reconstructs state-building as the result of negotiations between and among assertive aggrandizers and others, which create tolerable, durable policies and social structures that satisfy the majority (Blanton and Fargher 2008, 16–17; 2009, 134). An underlying insight may be that most human societies are happy to tolerate a certain amount of inequality provided that their needs are met (e.g., Dubreuil 2010). This insight encourages us to recognize that inequalities can arise due to processes other than the forceful subordination of some to others (as historians, e.g., Carneiro, often assume they must do). The observation that rule legitimated by force alone usually never lasts for very long likewise supports the notion that some fashion of collective agreement must lie at the heart of the inequalities present in durable social orders (Godelier 1978, 767).

One point of agreement among all of these perspectives concerns the conditions that would probably need to be in place for unequal social structures to come into being. Two key issues at play in many discussions are demographic growth and ecological conditions that allow for surplus production and accumulation. It seems that growth in population will almost always spur an increase in both violence and political hierarchy, often resulting in inequality (e.g., Webster 1975, 466–467; Hayden 2007, 251; Boix 2015, 9–10; Falk and Hildebolt 2017). Moreover, the differential ability of some individuals to accumulate surplus or special items produced with skilled labor was a key element in the instigation of violence, as those with less sought to pilfer from those with more, or those with more took advantage of their surplus to acquire the means by which to exploit others (e.g., Webster 1975, 467; Gosden 1989, 368; Spencer 1993, 48; Hayden 2007, 242; Boix 2015, 63). This would occur naturally anywhere that there was locally variable access to certain resources, like rivers or springs, and in areas where agricultural production varied dramatically within limited geographical ranges.

VIOLENCE AND UNEQUAL WEALTH ACCUMULATION: PROBLEMS AND COMPLICATIONS

As this review makes clear, a central concern of historical and anthropological literature on violence, states, and inequality has been explicating the role of coercion (or its alternatives) in the development of complex, unequal state societies. That this focus has left out two major vectors of the related dynamics—the possibility of gradual and peaceful resource-accumulation and

the role of violence in the *undoing* of states and inequality—has only recently been made clear by the work of Thomas Piketty and colleagues associated with the World Inequality Database. Piketty (2013) demonstrates that the enormous increases in wealth disparities across the Global North over the last two centuries have largely been accompanied by the near absence of social violence, instead attributing them to a central dynamic of the capitalist system. His argument, based on a large quantity of statistical and anecdotal data, emphasizes that the relative value of labor and capital play an important role in determining the rate at which wealth inequalities increase. The data show that, at least in late modern capitalist societies, economic environments in which low growth coexists with high returns on capital will show exaggerated rates of increase in unequal wealth distribution. According to Piketty's model, then, violent or coercive force need not be present for inequality to blossom. Indeed, Piketty's data suggest that the upswings in total violence (both between and within states) represented by the two World Wars instead *eroded* wealth disparities that had grown to large proportions during a long stretch of relative peace.

Walter Scheidel's *The Great Leveler* (2017) extends the temporal reach of Piketty's analysis over the last two millennia and in doing so finds support for Piketty's supposition: that the destruction of human and physical capital via large-scale violence (as well as other mechanisms, such as disease) reduces overall wealth inequalities and produces more equal societies. Scheidel's thesis dovetails somewhat with Morris's view that states are, above all, civilizing agents that maintain economically profitable peace within their borders. According to Scheidel, onsets of violent rupture throughout history have entailed a simultaneous erasure of protections for economic activity beyond a subsistence level provided by the state. These moments of conflict—most commonly war, revolution, state collapse, and pandemic—have repeatedly wiped the slate of inequality clean. Scheidel goes even further to claim that these violent shocks are the only mechanisms that have ever undone massive inequality in human history: inequality *only* recedes under conditions of unchecked violence.

These conclusions are striking to encounter within a broader anthropological and historical literature that almost universally sees coercive force and violent conquest as a main ingredient for the development of social inequality, in two ways. First, Piketty's model creates the possibility that peaceful conditions are *especially* conducive to the gradual and entirely anodyne accumulation of great fortunes in fewer and fewer hands. This would seem to contradict a prominent historical body of thought according to which the only reasonable way to gain

a fortune is to stab others and take their possessions, or to scare others into giving their goods up before you must resort to stabbing them. Second, an implication of the work of both Piketty and Scheidel would seem to be that violent conflict plays a greater role in wrecking fortunes and therefore increasing equality than it does in promoting unequal distributions of wealth.

Violence as a mode of eroding the inequities of the state finds some tangential support in other aspects of the anthropological literature. How to record levels of violence in ethnographically observed societies is deeply contentious (e.g., Chagnon 1968), as is the possibility of drawing conclusions from such levels about behavior in prehistoric, prestate societies. Data may suggest, however, that, when corrected for social scale, low-level violence is broadly ubiquitous across some ethnographically attested hunter-gatherer and horticulturalist societies (Keeley 1996; Falk and Hildebolt 2017). If this is not simply a function of the socio-trauma enacted by encountering states (and of course state-type violence [Ferguson and Whitehead 1992]), then it may be most productive to reflect less on the antiquity or intrinsicity of this behavior and more on the active social role it might play. Several scholars (e.g., Fowles 2018; Robb 2013, 664) have suggested that "simple," socially flat (i.e., normatively egalitarian) societies are in themselves desired outcomes that are actively curated through behavior, be it via impotent, situational, or multivalent leadership; enforced sumptuary constraints; formalized mocking and elaborate taboos; normative gifting and sharing; or complex models of resource ownership. Critically, Clastres (1974, 1980) emphasizes the centrality of violence to societies that he sees as constituted in an explicitly antistate mode (i.e., *la société contre l'état*), although he also stresses that even "violent" societies arbitrate authority according to not only skill in warfare but also other merits. Inbuilt, endemic, quotidian inter- and even intragroup conflict might potentially be considered an active agent in the series of behaviors that drive normative "simplicity," in Fowles's terms—a mode of being inherently antithetical to the state and to the institutional inequalities of the state.

VIOLENCE AND INEQUALITY: POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS FROM PREHISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY

The findings described in the previous section should be a major preoccupation for archaeologists of complex societies, as they cause us to arrive at something of an impasse. Foucauldian and Weberian violence has been central to many influential accounts of the early state, and—building on these and other traditions—scholars such as Carneiro, Tilly, Morris, and Scott explicitly connect

the state project and violence, alternatively a tool, an outcome, or even the raison d'être of the state. Conversely, Piketty and Scheidel (with an occasional supporting chorus of ethnographers and the odd prehistorian) provide cause to consider major revisions to lines of thinking about the relationship between violence and inequality in long-term human perspective. At the risk of gross but perhaps acceptable reductionism: does violence maintain simple, normatively egalitarian societies, or drive the emergence of the large, integrated societies we call states? Or does it, dependent on context and mode, do both? Archaeology now needs to rapidly incorporate bodies of scholarship that complicate or even invert how we understand the role of violence in wealth accumulation and state-building. While it seems imperative for archaeologists to reflect upon the dynamics highlighted by this work, it is equally likely that an archaeological perspective will be able to clarify or complicate the sweeping conclusions that Piketty and Scheidel, working mainly with textual data and evidence, have reached.

Bringing an archaeological perspective to bear on long-term questions about how inequality rises and falls is important because the study of inequality and its dynamics is a mature and long-standing facet of research in the discipline. As a result, archaeologists have developed many methods and approaches through which to investigate the rise and fall of social, economic, and political hierarchies in the human past. Some archaeologists working on ancient inequality have focused their research through the lens of modern inequality studies, whether by trying to apply modern methods of measuring inequality to historical contexts or considering how the dynamics that shape inequality (e.g., growth rates) in the modern world may have operated in premodern contexts. An additional body of research brings comparative evidence based on ethnographic observations to bear on interpretations of prehistoric societies. Other scholars contend that inequality can be measured directly in the unequal distribution of certain kinds of objects or assets in the archaeological record. Taken together, the tool kits available to archaeological researchers intent on investigating inequality are rich and varied, putting the discipline in an excellent position to contribute to the global conversation. Moreover, there are a number of conceptual vectors along which it seems that archaeology, especially prehistoric archaeology, can contribute to the questions recently raised by economic historians.

Not Seeing Like a State

The models and theories that have been most influential in shaping historical thought on violence and inequality originate in literate societies. This is not

surprising, because these models and theories have mostly been developed by historians who are trained in the analysis of textual evidence. There is good reason to believe that the texts and other sorts of written documents around which scholars have built up theories about violence and the state could reflect dynamics that pertain *especially* to literate societies, but which are likely to be confounded by careful study of nonliterate communities. It is important to emphasize that most texts in premodern literate societies were produced by states and functioned to serve the interest of those states. In ancient empires from the Near East to the New World, bombastic royal texts were little more than propaganda intended to glorify the ruler and reify control over his subjects. More mundane texts from ancient and premodern societies comprise administrative documents that tracked debts and assets of subjects, the better to control and exploit them (Desrosières 1993). In sum, texts from the premodern past almost always reflect the interests and perspectives of a tiny sliver of the population, usually wealthy and powerful men. It is not difficult to imagine that reading information about both proliferation of violent force and levels of inequality in society from these textual sources could produce biased and inaccurate ideas about the real impact of these forces in the past. Viewing social and economic dynamics through archaeological evidence, which does not necessarily suffer from the same elite, statist bias as textual evidence, might reveal dynamics that contest or nuance the models that historians have built up from the state's perspective.

Given that the technology of writing was probably deployed in certain kinds of states or under particular social conditions, it is likewise plausible that prehistoric societies that did not see the need for this kind of technology were qualitatively distinct in their power structures from states that deployed writing as a tool for economic and social control. Leaving questions of violence and inequality up to historians makes it impossible to query whether ideas drawn from textual sources cohere with the archaeological evidence for nonliterate societies. This is not an ideal situation, given that such societies are far more numerous than literate ones in the span of human history.

The Violence of Inequality

Those studying violence and inequality have tended to privilege a certain kind of violence in accounting for the relationships between states, unequal socioeconomic structures, and coercive force. In particular, historians seeking to quantify the incidence and frequency of violent events in certain kinds of societies define violence quite narrowly as explicitly physical force deployed

with the intent to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something. This narrow definition probably grows from a focus on relationships between state structures, state formation, and coercive violence. States are largely defined by their monopoly on the legitimate use of violent force, and historians have generally ignored violence that issues from the state (e.g., policing, the torture of political prisoners, etc.) in their calculations of rates of violence over time. Not only does this view take for granted the somewhat naïve notion that states define legitimate violence in a way that is just or fair, it also masks the immense diversity of forms that violence may take within and among societies.

Actions taken on the part of institutions like families, economies, and states often result in physical damage to individuals, and even though these forms of damage might not result in bloodshed or immediate death, it is easy to recognize that they represent a form of violence (Campbell 2014, 6–8). Likewise, modern society increasingly recognizes the prevalence and deeply unequal impact of structural violence, physical harm that is a product of the inherited and embedded organizational structures of societies (Iadicola and Shupe 2012, 308). Alternative forms of violence, especially those that are institutional and therefore often seen as unproblematic, have generally not been taken into account in scholarship on states, violent acts, and inequality. A broader definition of violence, recognizing a wider range of acts denying human beings physical freedom or health, changes the calculus of efforts to quantify violence and its relationship with political developments. For example, to consider the trenchant impact that economic inequality has had on poor and marginalized groups in the Roman Empire or the contemporary United States, including their vastly different life expectancies, economic resources, and rates of disease, as structural violence would undermine his claim that the strength of states has regularly diminished social violence within national borders overall.

Glimpsing and accounting for this kind of structural and institutional violence through textual evidence, which almost always represents a state's-eye view, can be challenging, since the state is likely to play down its own role in oppressing and destroying lives among its own population. Because material evidence need not be filtered through a state's or an elite's point of view, archaeologists are at greater liberty than historians to consider a broader view of violence, including consideration of the brutally coercive institutional forces at work in modern capitalist states (e.g., Pezzarossi 2019), which some historians have seen as ultimately peace-generating or peace-keeping entities. It seems that some of the promise in bringing archaeological research to bear on relationships between violence, states, and inequality

lies in the potential to complicate a model by which war makes states and states make peace.

Equalizing Forces beyond State Boundaries

Connecting violence to developments within states not only encourages a narrow definition of violence, but also limits our ability to understand the realities of violence and inequality, because it causes us to focus primarily on what happens within complex societies and states, whereas humans often move between and among them. Piketty's data is organized by nation-state, and he focuses on dynamics within states for this reason, while Scheidel also eschews consideration of dynamics of inequality between rather than within states. While states are partly defined by their relationship to coercive force and its socially legitimated use (e.g., Turchin and Gavrilets 2009, 168; Scheidel 2017, 43), violence and inequality between states is potentially just as important or interesting as a problem (Easterly 2019, 967–68). For example, borders are strongly demarcated, and movements among them monitored and limited in the modern world, but even so it is clear that individuals often respond to violent regimes and the ravages of warfare by moving from one community to another, often taking long, grueling journeys to do so. There are historical examples of migrations, for example, the mass relocation of people in the nineteenth century fleeing poverty or oppressive regimes to the New World, where land was plentiful, resulting in the kind of peaceful leveling that Scheidel claims not to exist based on a viewpoint that centers evidence from within states. Ignoring the permeability of boundaries of human communities is convenient, because it allows historians and archaeologists to construct closed models in which inequalities and levels of violence can be queried, but these models probably do not conform to the wide range of options available to actual humans experiencing such dynamics.

Case studies from archaeology may offer a different perspective on this issue. Since borders and states were less strongly defined in most of human history than they have been recently, archaeologists' ability to engage with many social systems and regional case studies in prehistory enables the field to consider how dynamics may differ in environments of more or less permeable state boundaries. In addition, archaeologists have devoted many decades to developing sophisticated means through which to trace and theorize movements of people between and among political units, putting the field in an excellent position to query the effects such movements may have had on dynamics of inequality.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS OF THIS VOLUME

As the relationship between social organization, complexity, inequality, and violence has been highlighted in recent research, it seems a timely moment for archaeologists to reconsider these dynamics through critical engagement with the material record. War and violence are confounding aspects of human society. While most find them dreadful and tragic to experience firsthand, their continued occurrence indicates that there must be something useful about coercion that ultimately allows humans to live in peaceful and satisfying communities together. Given the many contradictions of human violence, both Ian Morris and Thomas Piketty can simultaneously be correct—war and violence can both make and undo states, serve to build or unravel inequalities. Indeed, this is exactly what the papers in this volume indicate, as discussed in the concluding chapter. It seems germane, nonetheless, to ground such an observation in diligent investigations of such contradictions in the archaeological record. Archaeology is the only discipline with the temporal reach, comparative perspective, and pansocial optic to begin to theorize and explain the emergence and dissolution of complex, urban, hierarchically constructed societies. Moreover, it allows us to see beyond a modern ideology that privileges ideas inherent to a statist, capitalist world populated by *Homo economicus* and thus promises to inject new points of view to the debate.

The papers in this volume incorporate new models of the relationship between violence and social inequalities into the archaeology of social complexity, building more nuanced understandings of how different modes of social violence can militate toward different types of social constitution. Contributors to the volume tackle questions of violence and inequality from a variety of methodological angles (from the bioarchaeology of health and trauma and radiogenic isotope studies, to the aesthetics of violence). The papers take inspiration from a wide range of case studies, including research focusing on Bronze Age China (Roderick Campbell), the Peruvian Moche (Wilkinson, Swenson), Pueblo Bonito in Chaco Canyon (Harrod and Martin), Early Bronze Age Anatolia (Hassett), prehistoric Mesopotamia (Recht), First Dynasty Egypt (Roselyn Campbell), and imperial Rome (Stephan). The central problematics around which these studies orbit, however, remain consistent: what is violence, and how can we identify its enactment in the archaeological record? How was interpersonal violence deployed by different members of communities to achieve goals, and how might these individual acts intersect with or act in contrary to violence enacted by the state? How were cultural expectations around the enactment of violence built and maintained, especially concerning the authority to wield violence? How do structural, threatened, and explicit

forms of physical violence differ in the construction or dissolution of hierarchies? To what extent can we quantify interpersonal violence within populations in a manner robust enough to be tested against empirical economic data?

The papers in the volume address such questions both directly and obliquely from a variety of interpretative perspectives. In light of this diversity, the papers do not fall into clear groups or subsections, and each paper stands up as well individually as read in sequence. Readers are encouraged to engage with the papers as suits their own interests. Such as it is, the progression begins with papers that draw a relatively ambitious and broad theoretical line around their case studies, to those that respond more empirically to the challenges the editors have put forward.

To begin, Roderick Campbell addresses the issue of violence as a question of the commons, rather than (as it has more often been modeled) as a statist or elitist force exerted from on high. His contribution is a good entrée into the volume, opening as it does with a stirring high-level volley at the fundamental priors of virtually all extant models designed to address the notional yoke between hierarchy and coercive force. The case study on violence in Shang Anyang (China) contends that all violence in society must necessarily emerge from some form of collective deliberation, supporting the tenets of collective action theory discussed briefly above. This case raises many challenging fundamental questions for archaeologists studying violence and inequality. It puts paid to the validity of models so general they fail to distinguish themselves from one another when applied to real world examples, and calls for a better balance in measuring cooperative versus coercive forces leading to violent action.

Darryl Wilkinson invites further criticism of traditional models of violence and the state, especially questioning notions inherited from such thinkers as von Clausewitz and Carneiro, for example, that violence represents a force applied according to a standard definition of rationality by states with a defined end in mind. Rather, through a case study focused on Andean state formation, Wilkinson's paper argues that Andean rationality flows from an entirely heterogeneous form of rationality to those posited in Western Enlightenment thought. Thus, in the Moche context, war and the violence imposed through its pursuit fit entirely with a parallel pursuit of political gains seen through the inner workings of the Moche state, although we would classify many of the relevant violent acts as ritual in nature. Wilkinson's analysis also provides some interesting endeavors to probe the role of art and iconography in mediating between the wielding of violent acts as state strategy, and the persuasion necessary in making such acts palatable to society as a whole.

Edward Swenson's paper likewise treats the physicality of the Moche experience, examining the role of spatial containers for ritual violence as transformative of society's ontological fabric. The ritual expression of hierarchy through space, Swenson argues, provides an important basis for embedding inequality within the very worldview of the Moche subject, thus reducing the political elite's likelihood of facing dissent or disillusionment with its regime of regular bloodshed. This case study raises interesting queries for some of the models discussed in this introduction. In Moche society, it is impossible to identify any correlation between the practice of sacrifice and the strength or weakness of states (or stages of social development). A Morris-Tilly hypothesis positing the greater presence of internal violence where states are weak, and relatively less violence where unequal, strong, hierarchical states are efflorescent thus finds no support in the case of Moche state formation. This may highlight a point made by Wilkinson, that current models based largely on Western states and examples or those overly influenced by Western Enlightenment values may often miss the point when societies in different cultural ambits are under the lens.

The contribution by Ryan Harrod and Debra Martin continues down this path, providing an alternate view of violence and inequality based on contextual analysis of domestic structures and mortuary contexts in the Great House of Pueblo Bonito in Chaco Canyon (in what is now New Mexico). In addition to highlighting a community well outside the bounds of Enlightenment thought, the paper picks up some of Roderick Campbell's observations about the tensions between the collective interest in relative equality and the practical utility of violent force, showing how inequality and violence can serve both to bind communities and pull them apart, and often do so sequentially or cyclically. Harrod and Martin argue that intragroup hierarchies constructed through the application of coercive force at Pueblo Bonito contributed to the reduction of intergroup violence in the region overall. They also highlight the role of gambling within Puebloan ideology, as a ritualized mechanism that transmutes social control over the cosmic distribution of violence to the elite occupants of the Great Houses, raising interesting questions about how many social institutions, beyond those usually identified as connected to violence and unequal hierarchies, remain undertheorized.

Brenna Hassett considers some important fundamental questions about the visibility of violence. Hassett's discussion encompasses two major points of method and of interpretation, plus a case study of mass graves at Başur Höyük, an Early Bronze Age cemetery in what is now southeastern Turkey. First, Hassett asks, is it possible for archaeologists to confidently identify and

categorize violent acts based on evidence in the archaeological record? While we are often in a position to identify the victims of violence in the archaeological record, identifying the agency or motivation behind this violence is not a straightforward proposition. This conundrum calls into question whether we have a viable basis from which to reconstruct the performative or socially visible role of violence in past societies. However, it seems true that victims of violence meant to be visible to their contemporary societies might likewise be especially visible to us, since the commemorative or mortuary structures marking their ordeal are preferentially preserved in the archaeological record. Taking a multiscalar approach, Hassett thinks through the methods we might use to sort out the differences between what we (think we) see in the evidentiary sample obtained from the archaeological record and the ancient experience of seeing violence in a past context, and also between the prominence of violent death or commemoration in the landscape and the nature of individual experience. The case study of retainer deaths at Başur Höyük shows the value of this approach by using GIS (geographic information system) analysis to clarify the visibility of monuments commemorating violence in the outlying region, the intrasite complexity of different graves that signpost unequal violent treatment of the dead, and the individual traumas—probably at least some performed semi-publicly—visible on interred bodies. The paper provides a methodological roadmap for archaeologists treading the delicate territory of interpreting performative violence into a prehistoric environment where performances must always be inferred rather than seen directly.

Laerke Recht's paper takes us into the relatively untrodden world of victims of violence that have not often been "seen" in archaeological view—the ancient animals who lost their lives or freedom to human aggression, both during campaigns of warfare and eras of relative peace. Extant research on social violence and hierarchical structures has, to date, remained concerned with human-on-human violence. Recht contends that this human-centered myopia might be causing us to overlook how violence against animals can displace, model, or encourage human violence. Recht lays out the many empirical bases from which the nature and extent of human-on-animal violence might be reconstructed in the case of ancient Mesopotamia. This evidence certainly makes clear the important role that animal-targeted violence played in Mesopotamian propagandistic, military, and subsistence strategies. In a concluding discussion, Recht lands several points of relevance to the themes of the volume concerning ways in which human violence against animals probably intersects with human behavior aimed at acquiring wealth and building

hierarchies. For example, she argues that notions of othering and ownership over others embedded in human-animal relationships, starting with domestication, may have contributed to the increasingly potent force of the idea that humans might similarly dominate, destroy, own, and even consume their own kind. Thus, violence against and hierarchy over animals may have served as a kind of mirroring function charting a course toward complex instrumentation of violence in the human realm.

Few prehistoric societies call to mind social and economic hierarchy in extremis as strongly as pharaonic Egypt. Roselyn Campbell wades into the murky period of First Dynasty Egypt to assess the early stages of Egyptian political formation. Her paper is focused on the role of large-scale human sacrifice in reifying apparent structural changes to the Egyptian state that ushered in semidivine kingship and unified rule of the Nile Valley. She argues that the show of violent force—and the extreme inequality of subject and ruler emphasized in the sacrifice of elite officials relatively high up the social hierarchy—seems to have been effective as a short-term solution for shoring up a stable and durable political machine. As in the Moche and Pueblo Bonito case studies in this volume, it is clear that ritual and practical justifications for large-scale violence as part of the production of social hierarchies were tightly intertwined in early dynastic Egypt. However, the situation in Egypt is fascinating insofar as it seems that ritual consumption of lives may have served as much to eliminate potential political rivals and was focused on elites and courtiers rather than the general population. Given the durability of the Egyptian state, it might be that this was a highly successful strategy, but it was short-lived, as human sacrifice ceased to serve as a lever for royal state-making after the First Dynasty. Campbell makes a salient point that human sacrifice may have been replaced by more subtle means of coercion through structural violence, forced labor, or legal mechanisms such as capital punishment.

A similar relationship between mature states and increasingly subtle forms of violent expression of hierarchy is revealed in Robert Stephan's paper. Stephan's case study takes us inside the rise of what is perhaps the quintessential hegemonic, highly unequal empire—that of ancient Rome—and reveals that its advent may indeed have reduced the incidence of violent death, while not surprisingly eroding quality of life as indicated by rates of disease and malnourishment. The paper is methodologically important, because it shows what can be done using osteological data to get to a core issue that lurks behind all the essays on this topic: since all the periods under interrogation in the volume lack cliometric data of the sort generally used to assess population-scale levels of violence, how, if at all, can we begin to assess

whether or how changes in state regimes make the average person's experiences with violence different?

CONCLUSION

Taken together, the contributions yield a kaleidoscopic array of insights. To anticipate the general points that emerge in our concluding discussion, the major takeaways include (1) violence should be understood broadly, (2) inequality should be understood broadly, (3) violence operates in manifold, dynamic ways that may be either conducive to or erosive of inequality, and (4) inequality itself constitutes a rather intractable sort of social violence. Although the first three points are relatively intuitive, their implications for accurate historical modeling need to be emphasized. These implications are discussed at length in the concluding chapter.

The fourth point provides some interesting fodder for thought concerning the stakes of the current intellectual endeavor. As Roderick Campbell points out, eliding inequality within the definition of violence conceptually obviates the logic of either a Tilly-Morris or a Piketty-Scheidel hypothesis. Yet we also accept that inequality, and whatever violence it entails, is a totally ineradicable aspect of complex human society. Thus, while it seems salutary to accept that structures of inequality necessarily entail the presence of some violence, this does not recuse historical analysts from inquiring into the degree of inequality-as-violence that is acceptable or desirable, as opposed to some other situation that might involve more stabbing-as-violence, and emerging with some sense of historical perspective concerning the optimal configuration of society that reduces the overall harm of an expansively defined violence. In other words, the more broadly we expand our definition of violence, the more we must consider that violence *of some variety* is always going to be present—at scale, in thoroughgoing ways—in human society, as is already widely accepted vis-à-vis inequality.

Comparative historians often view their work not only as retrospective but also as prospective, and archaeologists generally see their task similarly. From this point of view, the job of a comparative analysis is to assess past institutions based on their differential performances and to use these observations to shape or provide guidance for the configuration of modern institutions. If we accept that both violence and inequality always coexist to some extent, the purpose of studying different configurations of violence and inequality is not simply interesting from an esoteric scholarly point of view. Rather, we ought to be aiming to produce some consensus about whether certain configurations

of society might produce outcomes that are net-positive or net-negative from the point of view of the common good. This compels us to develop some sort of (unequal) hierarchical ranking of forms of violence.

For example, while accepting that inequality exerts a form of structural violence on certain individuals, such structural violence may be construed along the lines of Ian Morris's argument as an acceptable form of violence, because it reduces the quantity of stabbing violence we endure in war. In other cases, we may argue that the stabbing violence of war is positive, because it helps to undermine or threaten the structural violence of inequality, which sometimes reaches levels that are intolerable to the majority. Thus, a more expansive definition of states or violence, suggested in many papers in the volume, does not necessarily invalidate the general models reviewed above, but does indicate that we may need a much more nuanced ledger book to draw up a meaningful balance sheet between different kinds of coercive force and their utility in shaping the kinds of societies we want to live in.

Another point emerging from the papers in this volume is how important it is for prehistoric archaeologists to be engaged in discussions about violence and inequality. In reviewing literature on the relationship between violence and inequality, we have highlighted various models attempting to describe or theorize such a relationship, most often put forward by anthropological or historical thinkers. Many of these models have tended to aim at constructing (and arguing for the validity of) universalizing or generalizing rules that make sense of the persistent presence of violence and inequality in human society, despite widespread general disinclination toward both phenomena amongst individual humans. Such arguments are often very compelling when taken in broad brushstrokes.

The papers in this volume are largely focused on more granular, bottom-up approaches that rely on the interpretation of specific archaeological contexts. While occasionally appealing to textual evidence, the authors mainly base their arguments in material contexts. Inevitably, and unsurprisingly, the conclusions do not necessarily always square with the relatively statist, top-down models emphasized by historians. One of their collective effects is to suggest that an accurate understanding of the impacts of violent action, broadly defined, on economic and social hierarchies, must accommodate multiple models operating at a variety of scales, that take into consideration the behavior of actors large and small, from the mammalian to the Machiavellian.

Admitting as much is not akin to ceding the ground of model-building or generalization. Rather, it maps a forward path in methods for building better, more accurate models that consider the experiences and impacts of actors

beyond states and political elites on social structure and individual behavior. A benefit and a drawback of working with archaeological contexts is that the information they provide attests to the messy reality of human society. On the one hand, the revelation of such realities provides insight into individual experiences and local dynamics. On the other hand, such gritty details are often difficult to square with the smooth surfaces of general models describing how society works. The challenge put to us as archaeologists is not simply to oppose the two, insisting that the tangled thread of past human experience is too large and complicated to unravel. Rather, our remit is to analytically work through the tangle of complexity and build increasingly thoughtful, responsive, and multifaceted models that can accommodate both, in ways that clarify patterns without masking complexity. This seems the main challenge that lies ahead, and an area in which only archaeological research can lead the way.

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