Alternative Pathways to Complexity

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Rich Blanton is a leader of the second generation of processual archaeologists coming out of University of Michigan in the 1970s. Building on the approaches of Kent Flannery, Jeffrey Parsons, and Henry Wright, we believed that social evolution involved systemic change in a broad range of social, political, and economic variables. In the 1980s, just as this cohort of young scholars was coming into its own, a group of “postprocessualists” heavily critiqued the first-generation ideas of Louis Binford (Earle and Preucel 1987). Their harshest criticisms, perhaps, were directed at its unilinear, staged-based formulation of social change. Among processualists, Rich showed leadership in his response, demonstrating fundamental ways by which to formulate a vital processualism. His insight was to focus on process (not typology), which allowed scholars to conceptualize the dynamic and variable structural arrangements of complex human societies (Blanton et al. 1996). For many archaeologists, his work has been inspirational.

Rich’s career and mine have parallel intellectual histories. In 1969, I arrived at the University of Michigan, and he was one of the first graduate students whom I got to know. He had recently returned from fieldwork in the Basin of Mexico, and I was fascinated to see how his systematic survey of a large region could yield data to investigate sociopolitical organization. His work was my first lesson on the interdependency between good theory and good data. Following in the footsteps

*Pathways to Power*

*Corporate and Network Strategies, Staple and Wealth Finance, and Primary and Secondary States*

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of Jeffrey Parsons, with whom Rich had worked in Mexico and whose Basin of Mexico data I had analyzed for my master’s paper (Earle 1976), Rich and I independently organized large-scale regional projects in Oaxaca, Mexico, and the Mantaro, Peru. Rich took on a new region that could be compared to Parsons’s surveys in the Basin of Mexico, and I took over Parsons’s Mantaro Valley project (D’Altroy and Hastorf 2001). The two of us focused on systematic large-scale regional research giving scope to investigate intertwined social, political, and economic processes in complex societies.

From this shared beginning, our careers have had at least three parallels. First was our mutual involvement with the Society for Economic Anthropology. From its beginning in 1981, the SEA has provided a forum for both of us to direct our economy-oriented archaeological research toward a general anthropological audience. Each year, the Society meets to consider a particular economic theme, and Rich’s participation in its first annual meeting and landmark publication helped place archaeology firmly within the subdiscipline of economic anthropology (Blanton 1983b). I followed his lead, to become regularly involved in the SEA. Over the years, archaeological participation in the SEA has included many of our collaborators and graduate students, helping to maintain economic anthropology as a core subdiscipline that integrates archaeology, history, cultural, and practice anthropology. Archaeologists in the SEA helped keep alive a strongly materialist understanding on long-term social history, to which Rich and I have been dedicated.

Second has been our parallel commitment to comparative research. Anthropology has a grand tradition of comparison, searching across cultures for common patterns. Rich’s book, *Ancient Mesoamerica* (Blanton et al. 1981), compared the archaeological trajectories of three regions, looking especially at broad-scale economic relationships. The success and interest of that volume provided a model for my comparative work on three world regions (Earle 1997) and then on three European regions during the Bronze Age (Earle and Kristiansen 2010). In collaboration with Lane Fargher, Rich conducted a major cross-cultural study of state societies, published as *Collective Action in the Formation of the Pre-Modern State* (Blanton and Fargher 2008; see also Blanton and Fargher 2009; Fargher and Blanton 2007).

Third is our shared focus on understanding the processes of social evolution. Writing independently with coauthors, our seminal articles “A Dual-Processual Theory for the Evolution of Mesoamerican Civilization” (Blanton et al. 1996) and “Ideology, materialization, and power strategies” (DeMarrais et al. 1996) were chosen by *Current Anthropology* (CA) to be published together. Here, Rich developed the distinction between corporate and network
strategies as a means by which to organize societies; these alternatives were orthogonal to gradations of complexity, suggesting that social evolution had alternative forms of structuring. His conception of alternative organizing strategies is arguably one of the most influential research directions of the past 20 years. Political organizations must be understood in terms of interpersonal processes that mix and match strategies of power and cooperation. CA’s decision to publish our articles together recognized the processual approach that we shared. Subsequently, the corporate–network distinction became central to my work (Earle 2002).

What is to be made of our parallel intellectual histories? Perhaps most important is to illustrate how scholarship develops. Scholars with a common academic background often develop along parallel intellectual lines. The graduate students from Michigan in the 1970s defined shared goals and scholarship focusing on sociopolitical and economic processes to create a distinctive social archaeology. Our similarities were reinforced by repeated contact and interactions at meetings, by our reading of each other’s papers, and by a common desire to solve research questions considering the sociopolitical organization of complex societies. The peer interactions in scholarship are evident; a generation, including Rich, Liz Brumfiel, Dick Drennan, and I, among others, followed rather different lines of evidence and interests, but our career paths have been intertwined.

To illustrate how Rich and I have interacted, I focus on our shared theoretical interest in political economy as the means by which emerging elites (or “principals” in Rich’s terminology) mobilized resources to finance their operation. My original conception of staple versus wealth finance formed part of his distinction between corporate and network strategies. Here, I argue for the importance of several additional factors that together created the complex pathways for social change. Key factors in the political economy of premodern societies were property rights over “bottlenecks,” and warrior complexes that served to control resource mobilization. Thus, the specific relationships among finance strategies, property rights, and warrior complexes affected the overall political-economic continuum from exclusionary to corporate strategies, and this complex overlap of variables appears to have been present in all complex societies from chiefdoms, through primary/secondary states, to modern states. As Lane Fargher commented on a draft of this chapter, where staple finance is associated with commoner claims to rights over landscapes (“internal revenues” in Blanton and Fargher 2008), a more corporate political economy emerges; in contrast, where elites claim personal ownership of productive lands (“external revenues” in Blanton and Fargher 2008), they can mobilize staple finance to
fund an exclusionary political economy. The same argument can be made for wealth finance and claims over bottlenecks. Where high-end goods are funneled into markets and taxed like regular goods, the state does not control the bottleneck (internal revenue) and a rather corporate political economy should emerge. Conversely, where the state monopolizes the production or distribution bottleneck (external revenue), we could expect the construction of an exclusionary political economy. Chiefs or kings can deploy warrior specialists to gain or maintain control over bottlenecks. Conversely, state militias or armies in corporate states could be tasked with defense and policing and not with dispossessing commoners for the benefit of a ruling class. Here, I illustrate how political processes created multiple pathways to complexity that resulted in continuous variability across corporate, network, and mixed political economies, showing the need to focus on the processes of social evolution and not evolutionary typologies.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY IN PREHISTORY

“It’s the economy, stupid” is a famous political statement. As a materialist, I believe that economic organization and resulting opportunities for productivity and control gird the development of alternative political institutions. Working with Terry D’Altroy in the 1980s, we formulated a distinction between staple and wealth finance as alternative means by which chiefdoms and states could mobilize surplus. With the publication of Blanton’s distinction between corporate and network strategies, I could better conceptualize how the nature of finance was so critically linked to contrasting political strategies.

Staple and Wealth Finance

In my research in Hawai‘i and then Peru, I saw that to understand complex societies required an understanding of how resources were mobilized to support ruling institutions (D’Altroy and Earle 1985; Earle and D’Altroy 1989). Although complex societies develop for a plethora of reasons, an absolute necessity was the mobilization of resources to support new institutions of governance and rule. D’Altroy and I defined two alternative means of finance (staple and wealth), and, using the Inca Empire, we showed how these strategies were combined. Our original definitions follow:

*Staple finance* . . . involves obligatory payments in kind to the state of subsistence goods such as grains, livestock, and clothing. The staples form accounting units
(bushel of wheat or a head of sheep) that have established values. Staples are collected by the state as a share of commoner produce, as a specified levy, or as produce from land worked with corvéé labor.

Wealth finance involves the manufacture and procurement of special products (valuable, primitive money, and currency . . . ) that are used as a means of payment. These wealth items often have established values with respect to other goods of a similar nature but vary in their convertibility into staples. (D’Altroy and Earle 1985:188)

The mobilization and distribution of staples versus wealth as the currency for finance were quite different. Staples were collected as rent from land owned by elites or their institutions. Because of weight, however, staples could not be moved great distances, and so they were used primarily locally. In contrast, wealth was mobilized by controlling the production and/or exchange of specialty items such as bodily decorations, personal kits (mirrors and razors), weapons, and currency. These items could be produced locally, but their value depended on rarity often tied to foreign origins. To understand how strategies of finance worked, the development and maintenance of these and alternative systems of tribute and taxation all rested on the existence of bottlenecks, points in the production and distribution chains that could be controlled. Such bottlenecks were highly variable, but not infinitely so, and they derived from a number of critical conditions (Earle and Spriggs 2015).

For staple finance, the most important bottleneck was land ownership. As originally conceived by David Ricardo (1821), land rent resulted from intensification, which pushed farming into suboptimal lands and required capital improvements such as drainage, terracing, and irrigation on prime lands. For both the use of poorer land and of improved land, the productivity of land in a region would have become sharply differentiated by quality, and the better lands could demand a rent because of their higher than average productivity. Intensification also created a physical marking in the landscape that allowed for the easy division of property. Staple finance was the most basic strategy of mobilization in agrarian chiefdoms and states, and land improved by irrigation is the clearest example of such engineered landscapes creating the foundation for staple finance (Earle and Doyle 2008).

For wealth finance, potential bottlenecks were diverse, but each was subject to different problems of control. The most direct was control over wealth production by specialists attached to the ruling segment (Earle 1987). This bottleneck required a particularly high level of skill so that only a few could produce the wealth items. The manufacture of bronze swords in northern Europe
offers a good example for such a controlled production system (DeMarrais et al. 1996; Earle 2004). Alternatively, wealth could be controlled during long-distance trading. If goods moved by water, for example, elites could own the transport vessels. Or chiefs could operate as stationary bandits, positioned strategically at choke points on high-volume routes, such as major rivers. Friedman and Rowlands (1977; Kristiansen 1998) describe the importance of prestige-goods exchange as the basis for social differentiation throughout Europe in the Bronze Age. Exchanges of foreign wealth structured relations among chiefs, whose status was materialized by these special objects.

To analyze the political economy as a means for institutional finance, the researcher must recognize the bottlenecks, how they were created, and how they might be circumvented to disrupt monopoly. The obvious question is: how were contrasting strategies of finance linked to different social formations?

Corporate versus Network Strategies and Political Economy in Pacific Prehistory

Blanton and his colleagues (Blanton et al. 1996) conceptualize corporate and network strategies as alternative political strategies to organize societies, and these structural differences link to various sources of revenues (local vs. external) in the political economy. Political strategies could be combined, changed, and used by alternative political segments to challenge or support each other’s search for power. Their original definitions follow:

In corporate strategies, power is shared across different groups and sectors in society in such a way as to inhibit exclusionary [network] strategies. (Blanton et al 1996:2)

In network strategies, preeminence is an outcome of the development and maintenance of individual-centered exchange relations primarily outside one’s local group. (Blanton et al 1996:4)

I expand on Blanton’s recognition of how political differences were linked to political economy by looking at the history of chiefdoms in the Pacific. Chiefdoms are middle-ranged societies that organize populations in the thousands or tens of thousands. Most important is the ability of chiefs to exercise central power. The Pacific illustrates vividly how chiefs came to power in different ways as they crafted their political strategies of expansion and consolidation (Earle and Spriggs 2015). The foundation for Oceanic political strategies appears to have rested originally on prestige-good exchange
networks as tied to long-distance feats of valor, but, following colonization, most island societies became focused on corporate strategies and staple mobilization. With the expansion of the Chinese empire, trade in luxury products resulted in the development of “secondary” chiefdoms in the Philippines and elsewhere in the extreme western Pacific. The changing opportunities for control in the political economies of the Pacific can be seen as highly variable and linked to contrasting political strategies involving warrior might and religious legitimation.

In the Bismarck Archipelago through the main Solomon Islands off New Guinea, a regional culture, called Lapita, emerged sometime after 1400 BP (Kirch 1997). Occupying small islands and the coastal fringe of larger islands, Lapita maintained a distinctive maritime orientation. They were involved in fishing, long-distance exploration, trade (obsidian, axes, ceramics) (Kirch 1991), and perhaps raiding (common historically in maritime societies). In conjunction with linguistic evidence, the archaeological record documents many shell valuables and a highly decorated pottery tradition, suggestive of small-scale social hierarchies (Green 2002).

Friedman (1981) argued that Lapita was structured by prestige-goods exchange, similar to that described for European prehistory. Exemplifying social ranking described in the region’s ethnographies, status in Lapita culture may have been linked to external ceremonial exchanges of valuables (Kirch 1991). But what were the potential bottlenecks in the prestige-good system that allowed for social differentiation? Where island groups were closely spaced, control over trade and interaction would have been problematic. For more isolated island groups, like the Trobriand Islanders, however, the bottleneck was probably ownership of seagoing craft adequate for successful navigation across broader expanses of open water (Brunton 1975; Earle 2002; Hayden 1983). For example, labor crews and specialists supported by a chief’s resources built the elaborate boats used in Kula voyages, and chiefs were their owners (Malinowski 1922). Also, the risks of distant expeditions were seen as requiring elaborate ritual magic for success, and this magic too was the property of the chief. These chiefs were able to dominate trading expeditions, and virtually all valuables went through their hands. In highly elaborate ceremonial displays, chiefs exchanged shell valuables with elite partners as a means to build prestige. We can imagine that such distant voyaging created a small-scale hierarchical structure based both on the special knowledge of ritual and navigation and on the ownership of boats. However, I propose that control over canoes was a rather weak bottleneck, open to many comers, and, thus, limited the degree to which elites could centralize power.
As part of the broadly networked Lapita society, voyagers explored and colonized deep into the Pacific, reaching the islands of Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa (Irwin 1992). Exploration was purposeful, part of a strategy to find new resources and establish new venues for political action. Following colonization in the deep Pacific, however, economic opportunities changed to include many isolated islands with relatively greater agricultural potential (Kirch 2000). Partially because of the distance between the major island groups, a network-based trading economy became of much less importance, except perhaps in some Micronesia island groups and in the Tonga archipelago. Alternatively, the opportunities for a highly intensive, staple-based political economy based on corporate strategies became the core of the political economies on the larger islands groups, replacing the earlier network strategies on which Lapita ranking was initially based.

Social evolution of Hawaiian chiefdoms provides a vivid example of one of the pathways for political development. By the time of Western contact, the chiefdoms of several Hawaiian Islands had formed state-like political structures with territorial divisions for taxation and divine rule to legitimize strong central authority (Kirch 2010; Hommon 2013; Earle 2012). Irrigation agriculture was a critical bottleneck in this case (Earle 1980). The intensification of the landscape—especially with irrigation, but also with fishponds; banana, breadfruit, and coconut groves; and dryland fields—created an engineered landscape of walls and spaces that were divided up among chiefs and farmers embedded in an overlapping system of property rights (Earle and Doyle 2008). Commoners received land on an irrigation system or on other agricultural complexes in return for working on plots set aside for the chiefs. The surplus generated supported the chiefs, their attached specialists (including land managers, artisans, warriors, and priests), and labor crews for constructing productive facilities like irrigation systems and fishponds, monuments and roads, and work at major ceremonies (Earle 1978). Such an intensified agrarian base supported the classic corporate structure, providing a particularly clear example of how a property system based on an engineered landscape allowed for staple mobilization. At the same time, because the irrigation systems were built and operated by commoner farmers, one would expect that the commoner could claim moral obligations from their chiefs. Here the role of warriors conquering the land and thus asserting exclusive ownership for the governing paramount chief was essential.

Kirch (1994, 2010) argues that the largest and most complex chiefdoms developed into states on Maui and the Big Island of Hawai’i, where irrigated agriculture was of only secondary importance to dryland farming. These
less-productive lands created a more dispersed and lower-intensity agricultural base that was more susceptible to failure (Ladefoged et al. 2009). Initially, it might seem that such a lower-intensity agricultural base would be less likely than an irrigation-based economy to form the footing for state polities. The particular outcome, however, appears to have been linked to expansionist warfare so often identified as the crucible for state formation (e.g., Carneiro 1970). In such situations, warfare, rather than the development of a permanently productive infrastructure, served as the dominant means to increase surplus extraction. Surplus generated from local staple production was used by chiefs to support specialized warriors, who defended the chief, asserted rights to surplus from lands, and expanded by conquest the regions from which surplus could be mobilized. Where a less-intensive productive base existed, warriors thus served to maximize surplus extraction through conquest and in the process broke the ownership of local communities. High-ranking warrior chiefs received local communities as fiefs in return for their loyalty to the paramount. Lower-ranked warriors became local land managers (konohiki) and received subsistence land grants, sometimes on newly developed irrigation systems (Earle 1978). State-like polities were made by warrior conquest as a strategy to maximize surplus extraction when agricultural intensification was costly or inefficient. Basically, warrior might provided a means to abrogate the corporate contract in cases where the dispersion of productive resources made it hard for chiefs to control farmers, who produced the surplus for finance.

For a staple finance strategy to work in less-intensive agricultural economies, warriors created an extensive polity based on physical force with a rather “exclusionary” or extractive character that seems to have reversed the typical corporate identity of staple-based polities. Thus, as suggested in conversation with Fargher, territorial conquest converted an agricultural system closely associated with a long history of commoner development into an external revenue source (using Blanton and Fargher’s [2008] terms). Following conquest, paramount chiefs were able to treat agricultural lands as personal property. As illustrated by the Hawaiian chiefdoms, the elaboration of an ideology of divine rule may then have been necessary to institutionalize the larger political order. Thus, primary state formation involved a particular hybrid strategy, mixing corporate and exclusionary policies stabilized by an elaborate and theatrical ideology. Following Kolb’s (1994) analysis of religious monuments, an early construction of community heiau (religious shrine) was probably part of developing a largely corporate strategy for mobilization, but the progressive association of some of these monuments with grand ceremonies involving
human sacrifice to the god of war effectively severed this dependent bond between chiefs and commoner farmers.

In the extreme western Pacific, a more typical network political strategy appears to have emerged. As a China-centric trade sphere expanded after 1000 BP, the Philippine Islands witnessed the elaboration of chiefdoms (Junker 1999). Rather than control over land and its staple productions, chiefs depended on, “control over individuals and groups established through the construction and maintenance of alliance networks, which fluctuated in size and composition over time according to the chief’s ability to pull individuals and groups into his sphere of influence” (Junker 1990). A local development in ranking propelled local chiefs to search out opportunities to funnel specialty items into the expanding Chinese market. The goal was to obtain valued imports (including Chinese ceramics and metal) that provided the media to expand an already existing prestige-goods exchange network. Although these imports were derived externally, the elaboration of the region’s chiefdoms was an internal matter, involving local chiefs controlling the collection of forest products for export and the distribution of Chinese imports. Although most would call the developments of social ranking in the Philippines a response to Chinese contact (thus providing an example of “secondary” chiefdom formation), Junker (1990) makes clear that the Chinese traders provided only expanded opportunities for trade in an existing prestige-goods system. Raiding also was a critical part of the political process, illustrating highly dynamic warrior strategies geared toward directing the movement of prestige goods. The driving forces in Filipino political development were regional, as chiefs actively sought dominance of prestige-goods exchange with a clear network strategy. The existence of this exchange, not the contact with China specifically, drove social evolution.

Oceanic prehistory and societies illustrate a highly variable mix between corporate and network strategies. Chiefdoms arose by developing political economies to generate the surplus in staples or wealth to finance their operations. Chiefdoms were transformed based on available means and opportunities for bottlenecks in resource production and distribution. This variation was further complicated by the active role of warriors in political strategies to control the political economy. My sense is that the conjunction between political economic and warrior strategies might help lay bare the processes energizing emerging institutions along alternative pathways. Although not considered in detail by Blanton’s original formation, warfare is perhaps a key element for understanding how different systems of political economy were linked to particular power strategies (see Peregrine and Ember, chapter 12, this volume).
THE EVOLUTION OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY STATES

Like Blanton, I believe that social evolution should be a central topic of our discipline, and modern archaeology offers the only systematic opportunity to describe the long-term trajectories of change in social evolution. We both reject evolutionary typologies as anything more than heuristic devices and rather seek to investigate comparatively long-term archaeological sequences to discover how common processes resulted in diverse historical developments. When we were in graduate school together, a major focus of research was the attempt to explain the origin of states.

Definitions of states vary, but several traits seem critical. States represent large-scale polities (populations of 100,000s and more) that have diverse ethnic, historic, and economic settings (Johnson and Earle 2000). States and empires were social mosaics spread over large areas, often of thousands of square kilometers, and an ideology of divine rule provided an essential religious superstructure, especially in states dependent on the mobilization of agricultural surplus generated by local commoners (Kirch 2010). The specific characteristics of states were, I believe, less important than the organizational challenges and diverse solutions concerning how to organize a large polity. To effectively control and manage such populations and territories required the development of comprehensive institutions that potentially included a mixture of state religions, bureaucracies, military and police force, judicial bodies, administered economies of irrigation and trade, road systems, and the like. Any premodern state combined some assortment of these institutions, although the particular mix varied for historical and processual reasons. Each state institution had the common job of coordinating large-scale polities, and to accomplish this objective each institution was associated with extensive facilities, personnel, equipment, and special ceremonies. The physical reality of such institutions required a means to finance their operations. In this regard, archaic states were really almost super chiefdoms, which must have elaborated means to finance their expanded reach. States were not simply imagined; they were physically manifest by their new institutions supported through political economies.

A political economy approach should help us understand the emergence and development of states. In their masterful cross-cultural study of states, Blanton and Fargher (2008) propose an extension of the original corporate-network distinction as a means to understand traditional states. They suggest that, when the primary revenue sources for a state were locally derived from its subjects, the state had to provide acceptable services (the common good) to keep their subject populations from resisting tax demands. Alternatively,
an external source of revenue for states lessened the dependency of the state on its subjects and allowed for a more self-serving leadership. Their argument derives from a political science approach that considers how states were articulated with the world economy. In the terms originally used by Blanton and myself, in states emphasizing a corporate strategy, commoners control agricultural production and so maintained more of a collective action ethos. However, states emphasized more of an exclusionary strategy when rulers claimed these same agricultural systems through right of conquest. Alternatively, the dependency on wealth finance was exclusionary, being based on the control over high-end wealth objects, but a shift toward taxing traders and export producers could create what amounts to a local or corporate revenue source.

Using these insights within a political economy approach, I suggest that the typological distinction between primary and secondary states must be reconsidered. The distinction has long been used rather arbitrarily to suggest that studies of the origin of states must focus on examples of primary states that developed independently. In contrast, secondary states have been of little interest, because their development is seen as an outcome of acculturation (but see Price 1978).

The typological distinction should be rethought in terms of processes of state formation based on how emerging state institutions were financed either internally or externally. Institutions that constitute states “are not exportable” (Price 1978:182). States should not be considered as a trait that can diffuse; they developed both in isolation and equally in association with other states. All chiefly leaders wish to be kings, and the origin of states depended on whether would-be sovereigns could develop systems of finance to support state institutions and to exclude rights of the common horde.

The formation of states was made possible by an ability to finance institutions, based either internally on agricultural intensification (staple finance) or externally on networks of trade and raiding (wealth finance). As ideal types, I believe that primary states were dependent more on local resource mobilization and secondary states were dependent more on external resource procurement. In fact, these strategies represented a graded mix that shifted opportunistically according to operational conditions. Similar to the patterns described for the Oceanic chiefdoms, any state was a fluctuating mixture of power strategies.

**Primary States**

Primary states emerged where no states had existed before and in isolation from all other states. They are, therefore, considered to be an invention
of a new political form, for which researchers can investigate causes of their origin. The normal list of primary states includes Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, China, Mesoamerica, and coastal Peru, and a strong argument can be made to include the Hawaiian Islands as another primary state (Hommon 2013; Kirch 2010). Primary state origins must be studied archaeologically, because they all formed either prior to general writing or in regions isolated from societies with writing. From an archaeological perspective, the characteristics of states and the probable causes for state origins were distinctive to each situation, and a general consensus argues that state origins resulted from interacting variables (Wright 1977). Although I agree with this statement, I would add that primary states all required the sustained and substantial mobilization of resources to support their broadly reaching institutions of power and integration. Although states can be financed in diverse ways, primary states appear to have relied first and foremost on corporate strategies, involving the mobilization of local staples. Relatively high population and agricultural intensification created an engineered landscape (Earle 1978). Perhaps most important were situations like Mesopotamia, Peru, and the Hawaiian Islands, where irrigation agriculture served as a primary basis of intensification; the contrast in both productivity and stability between the wet and the dry effectively caged farmers, creating the bottleneck allowing the mobilization of staples and/or corvée labor as an obligatory rent (Childe 1951; Mann 1986).

Primary states appear to have relied heavily on corporate strategies with staple finance; however, these states additionally developed a military to extend power and maximize surplus extraction. Along coastal Peru, the highly productive and large-scale irrigation agriculture formed the basis for condensed state-like societies that included the Early Intermediate-period Moche and Lima states. But these societies operated much like chiefdoms, without strong political centralization. I have long felt that the city-states of the Middle East or Mesoamerica were variants of chiefdoms, with some incipient institutional characteristics of states made possible by staple finance from their highly productive, irrigation base. Castillo (2007) calls Moche an example of an “opportunistic state,” for which central power across a broad region was largely ceremonial with little administration superstructure. In the highlands of Peru, in contrast, irrigation agriculture was initially of much lesser scale and productivity, and this limited staple-based political economy may have created a need to expand the polities’ financial base through conquest. Jennings (2011) has argued that the Wari polity developed an expansive empire without first creating a regional state. Conquest makes states, and the logic may rest on the construction of a political economy to suck in new revenue sources
across vast areas claimed as the property of the conquering monarch. The local agrarian city-states, with their potential collective-action structure, may have been superseded by imperial conquest that distanced the ruling institutions from their base.

Can you have primary state formation based on trade rather than on staple finance and conquest warfare? Theoretically yes, but practically it does not appear to have happened often. I am particularly intrigued by ongoing work in Micronesia and Tonga that may help resolve our understanding of this issue. I feel, however, that what we are dealing with is a definitional problem: emergent states based on external revenue sources may automatically be classified as “secondary” states. Chiefdoms may emerge based on peer-polity interaction involving control over regional prestige-goods exchanges (Friedman and Rowlands 1977); however, the volume of trade would probably be inadequate to support the needed volume to support a state. Conversely, as primary states expand into empires, they start to use wealth in increasing volume, creating trade systems emanating from their core.

Secondary States

Secondary states emerged within the broader context of existing states, especially when chiefdom-scale societies became linked into external flows of goods that served as a source for wealth finance. The foundational article is “Secondary State Formation: An Explanatory model” (Price 1978). Price envisioned various forms of secondary states. Most important was the expansion of primary (staple-based) states through conquest and intimidation, transforming local chiefdoms or city-states into revenue-producing polities that exported surplus to the dominant imperial state. Her argument seems reasonable and agrees well with the militaristic role of state expansion from a core staple base. Basically, the conquered local polity would have been required to redirect its production, often staple based, toward supporting tributary demands from the external power.

Expanding imperial states alternatively may have targeted areas for conquest where special raw materials or wealth objects were available, and tribute could be extracted and moved across the great distances involved in empires with relatively little transport cost (D’Altroy and Earle 1985). In Mesoamerica, the expanding Classic-period state of Teotihuacan may have targeted regions for conquest with particular resources such as cacao and jade (Braswell 2003; Price 1978:172). The Aztec state subsequently relied on tribute extraction of wealth objects, such as textiles and cacao, from conquered city-states (Berdan et al.
By conquering northwestern Argentina, the Inca Empire targeted a region rich in copper that was extracted for the expanding wealth-finance system of the empire (Earle 1994). These are examples of conquest. State structures were imposed from the outside as a means of direct imperial tribute extraction.

A more important process in “secondary state” formation, however, involved a balanced interaction between central states and periphery developments. States arise on the edge of core agrarian states in situations where direct control and intimidation by the central agrarian states were impractical. Local lords created political economies based on the control of wealth flows toward the core states. The elites in staple-based states, I would argue, increasingly wanted to incorporate wealth finance for a more flexible political economy (D’Altroy and Earle 1985). The desire for wealth as a store of value and as a display of elite distinction that distanced them from the ruled created a heavy demand for both special raw materials and prestige goods from the outside. As status in the core became based on foreign goods, the corporate dependency of the ruling elites on a local populace lessened, resulting in a more class-stratified society, what Blanton refers to as an “exclusionary strategy.”

As a result, networks of exchange in high-end prestige goods and materials such as metals would have radiated out into the periphery. Some attempt might well be made by core states to control production and trade through imperial conquest, but I believe that such attempts would be both costly and risky. More common would have been attempts to establish long-distance trading relationships in wealth objects (Stein 1999). This high-end trade then offered the peripheral societies the opportunity to control production and transport in those wealth objects, and thus allowed the elites in the periphery an external source of wealth only weakly tied to underlying staple intensification. As illustrated by the region to the north of Mesopotamia, the result was an aura of trade-based chiefdoms and states arching above the agrarian states in the plain. What Renfrew and Cherry (1986) call “peer polity interaction” would appear to exemplify the emergence of complexity based on network relationships of wealth exchange that offered foreign resource sources for local political economies. Where the movement was extensive and controllable through bottlenecks in production or distribution of the wealth, secondary state formation could be based on control over these networks in a classic exclusionary strategy.

Here the critical article is “Secondary States in Perspective: An Integrated Approach to State Formation in the Prehistoric Aegean” (Parkinson and Galaty 2007). The authors look closely at the Minoan and Mycenaean states that emerged in the Aegean during the Late Bronze Age. Renfrew (1972) had
argued that Bronze Age Aegean complexity was autochthonous, resulting from local agrarian intensification and the development of regional networks of wealth exchange. He stressed the primary (independent) development in the Aegean, countering a longstanding belief that European development was simply secondary, a result of contacts with an eastern “cradle of civilization.” Parkinson and Galaty (2007:table 2) argue too that the development of Protopalatial Minoan states resulted from local corporate strategies, but that they still represented secondary state formation because of “interaction with Mesopotamia.” I don’t like the vagueness of “interaction,” whether used by Renfrew or Parkinson and Galaty. State institutions were not exportable; instead conditions in the political economy provided the material support for new institutional forms that might be modeled on existing forms seen elsewhere. The emergence of the state-like structures in the Aegean during the Bronze Age was probably based on Minoan and Mycenaean elites being able to control key bottlenecks in the networks of trade in metals and other wealth goods, and then they would have used foreign ideologies to legitimize institutionalization (Earle 2011).

I question whether the distinction between primary and secondary states has real analytical value. Should we reconceive of emerging states as based on common processes that mix and match strategies of local and distant resource mobilizations in the political economy? Thus a “secondary” (wealth-financed) state may well be connected to a “primary” (staple-based) state, and that connection may result in “borrowings” of both symbols and structures of power for state institution building. Processes of finance were the drivers here, not the borrowing of ideas. As Renfrew stressed, it is unclear whether the Aegean linkage to Mesopotamia and Egypt was determining; rather it may simply have been the culmination of control over high-end exchanges that had been developing in Europe throughout the Bronze Age and that had as a part the connection to the imperial societies to the east. The later Iron Age states of the Greeks and Phoenicians were trade-based societies spread across the Mediterranean, competing militarily and commercially to develop and control trade in high-end items that included pottery, glass, metal, wine, and olive oil. Certainly these trading empires were linked into the agrarian states that bordered the Mediterranean, but the bulk of trade and wealth generated was most probably outside of those relationships. The trading empires of the Mediterranean were entrepreneurial and decentralized. The trade-based source of state revenues derived from external sources, but only through local taxation of a class of wealthy traders and estate owners, thus creating effectively a corporate-like strategy.
To maintain and expand state institutions, elites mobilized resources opportunistically by staple and wealth finance. According to logistical concerns for power at a distance, all states became involved in wealth trade as a highly mobile and thus easily centralized means of finance. The ripple effect was to create a world of interacting states more or less reliant on administered trade in high-end goods. These systems can be described as peer-polity interaction, but they appear to me to represent interlinked political economies that created rapidly expanding political spheres of action.

CONCLUSIONS

Rich Blanton is a leading member of a cohort of processual archaeologists focused on complex societies and using a political economy approach to understand organizational differences and change. He and his coauthors provide the foundational distinction between corporate and network strategies for sociopolitical structuring that helped set the agenda for a generation of research. His conception is processual, not typological.

To be able to understand the variation that their distinction represents, I emphasize the necessary role of resource mobilization. Different sources of revenue supported chiefly and state institutions derived from structured political economies, and the ability to channel resource flows from these economies into public coffers stems from controlling specific bottlenecks in the systems. When seeking to explain the emergence of complex institutions, a corporate strategy relied on bottlenecks linked to land tenure. The most dramatic case was chiefly or state ownership of irrigation systems, although any condition of intensive land use linked to a dominant warrior elite created the ability to control local production. A network strategy, in contrast, relied on bottlenecks linked to control over the production and distribution of prestige goods. External flows of goods could be controlled through attached specialization, ownership of transport systems (boats, for example), or channeled routes of high-volume transport. To a greater or lesser extent, warriors might have played a critical role, especially as the scope of political action spread across larger distances through conquest and trade. The importance of a warrior elite probably was responsible for a more exclusionary basis to rule and may have been compensated by increased elaboration of ideologies of divinity. A critical step in the development of trade states appears to have been the abandonment of direct control over trade and rather the imposition of direct taxes on traders and producers that made the sources of revenue essentially local (Blanton and Fargher 2008). But that is another story.
Understanding the contrasting pathways to power must be based on understanding mixed strategies of control over the political economy. This orientation helps to redirect our attention away from typological distinction and toward the comparison of prehistoric sequences and the processes that they represent. Such a research strategy changes the nature of archaeological research, deemphasizing concerns with origins and diffusion. Institutions should not be seen as ideas or technologies that are invented, transferred, and inherited. Rather institutions are complicated organizations based on dynamic and changing political, social, religious, and economic relationships. To understand such organizations, we must focus on the strategies of power and finance that cause the formulation, spread, collapse, and reconfiguration of structured institutions. The longstanding distinction between primary and secondary states can be reconfigured as the contrasting alternative political strategies involved in increasing or decreasing centralization of power through institutions related to economy, force, and belief. Stratified and centralized societies may prove to be quite similar in process, but differentiated by the historical opportunities and challenges that characterize a changing political economy.

NOTE
1. Secondary states included those that were subsequent to earlier states (Price 1978; Parkinson and Galaty 2007). Here the distinctive characteristics involved preexisting institutions of power and finance. But institutions cannot simply be inherited; they must be sustained materially. To understand “subsequent states,” as I like to call them, the same analytical approach should apply: we must understand the processes of state governance that rested on institutions of power that required control over bottlenecks in the political economy.