



# The Archaeological Journal

## Book Reviews



**ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE ORIGIN OF THE STATE: THE THEORIES.** By Vincente Lull and Rafael Micó. Pp. 320. Oxford University Press, 2011. Price: £71.00. ISBN 978 019955 784 4.

This book may serve as a reader for courses on the origin of the state, as it presents the history of research from Antiquity to the present in Part I (pp. 1–168). In the first six chapters we are briefly presented with views on the state as perceived by Aristotle and Plato (Chapter 1), Christian thinkers (Chapter 2), and through the Renaissance into the Enlightenment as represented by Locke and Hobbes' ideas about a contractual relationship between people and state (Chapters 3–4), to Rousseau's ideas about natural freedom (Chapter 5), and Hegel's view on the Absolutist state (Chapter 6). In Chapter 7 we are introduced to Marx's critique of Hegel and his introduction of the basic concepts of his materialism, which were to have a lasting effect on subsequent studies. This is followed by a lengthy chapter (8) which explores Lewis Morgan's work, which likewise had a profound effect on later thinking, including Marx and Engels, not least Engel's book on the origin of the state and of private property (*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 1884). It was Morgan who introduced the concepts of savagery, barbarism and civilization (*Ancient Society*, 1877), later employed by Gordon Childe. New evolutionary concepts that relied heavily on comparative ethnographic evidence were introduced by Morton Fried and Elman Service in path-breaking books on social evolution and the state during the 1960s and 1970s. It represented a revival of the evolutionary ideas of the late nineteenth century. These eight chapters form the first part of the book. One can always critique the selection of material — for instance, Leslie White and Marvis Harris represented a stricter materialist approach to social evolution and the state, that could have deserved more room — but the chapters present a readable outline from where one can move on.

Part II (pp. 175–272) is dedicated to the archaeology of the state, beginning in Chapter 9 with Gordon Childe and followed by a discussion of processual archaeology and the state (pp. 176–226). The chapter ends with some reflections on the archaeology of the state in post-modern times. Chapter 10 presents, in thirty pages, the author's vision of a Marxist archaeology of the state, which is based mainly on Spanish evidence, and a rather orthodox application of Marx's theories that ignores theoretical redefinitions by French Structuralism and the English/American applications of world-system theories to archaeology. Here, a major critique of the state as an independent entity was introduced, and the world-system approach defined tribes, chiefdoms and states as parts of larger interacting social systems without clear borders. These and other omissions are major flaws, and they are not compensated for in the final epilogue, although this does at least contain some good reflections (Chapter 11).

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As will be clear, I have mixed feelings about the book: Part I is a useful reader, but Part II, with its heavy-handed traditional Marxism that ignores major theoretical critiques and redefinitions of the state, cannot be recommended, unless added with more up-to-date publications. Thus, much new archaeological literature on the origin of the state have come to light in recent years, from Norman Yoffee's critique of the Archaic State (*Myths of the Archaic State*, 2005), over Bruce Trigger's major comparative study of early states (*Understanding Early Civilizations*, 2007) to proponents of the archaic state (W. Parkinson and M. Galaty: *Archaic State Interaction*, 2007). This is just a small selection, but these and other recent books and articles on the origin of the state suggests that we are entering a new phase of comparative research into state formation, for which Part I in the book under review may serve as a useful historical introduction, and Part II as an example of a rather specific Spanish Marxist theoretical tradition.

KRISTIAN KRISTIANSEN