


The Dawn of Everything

Session 5

Chapter 10 – Why the State has no
Origin



Chapter 11 – Full Circle

OLLI Discussion Group
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Chapter 10 – Why the State Has No Origin

- This chapter the humble beginnings of sovereignty, bureaucracy, and politics.
- They discuss the origins of the nation-state which is the most common form of political and social organization across the globe today.
- They say there is no single origin for the inception of the state as an organizing political force.

Chapter 10 – Why the State Has No Origin



- There was no inevitable march toward what might appear to be a forgone conclusion.
- Peoples in separate regions developed different to ways govern and create culture.
- People experimented with forms of government and social organization.

Chapter 10 – Why the State Has No Origin

- Sometimes these political behaviors changed over time.
- The authors determine that the nation-state was not inevitable.
- Early forms of bureaucracy and politics often allowed ordinary people a great deal of autonomy.
- Where large and powerful cities arose, kingdoms and empires tended to emerge.

Fundamental forms of Freedom

- The authors maintain that there are three fundamental or primary forms of freedom:
 - The freedom to move,
 - The freedom to disobey arbitrary orders,
 - The freedom to reorganize social relations.
- These freedoms can be restricted in various ways through social and state power.



Foundation of Social and State Power

- Three principles set the stage for the emergence of a state in some form:
 - Control of violence (sovereignty),
 - Control of information (administration).
 - Individual charisma.
- These three principles may operate to varying degrees with no single pathway to state or empire.

The Olmec Civilization

- Represent the “mother culture” of all later Mesoamerican civilizations.
- They invented the region’s calendar system, glyphic writing, and even ball games.
- They lived along the fringes of Mexico’s gulf coast in swampy areas with ceremonial precincts including earthen pyramid mounds.
- These were surrounded by extensive suburban areas of small maize-farming settlements and seasonal foraging camps.



MEXICO



TOLTEC

AZTEC

Tenochtitlan

MIXTEC

ZAPOTEC

OLMEC

MAYA

BELIZE

GUATEMALA

HONDURAS

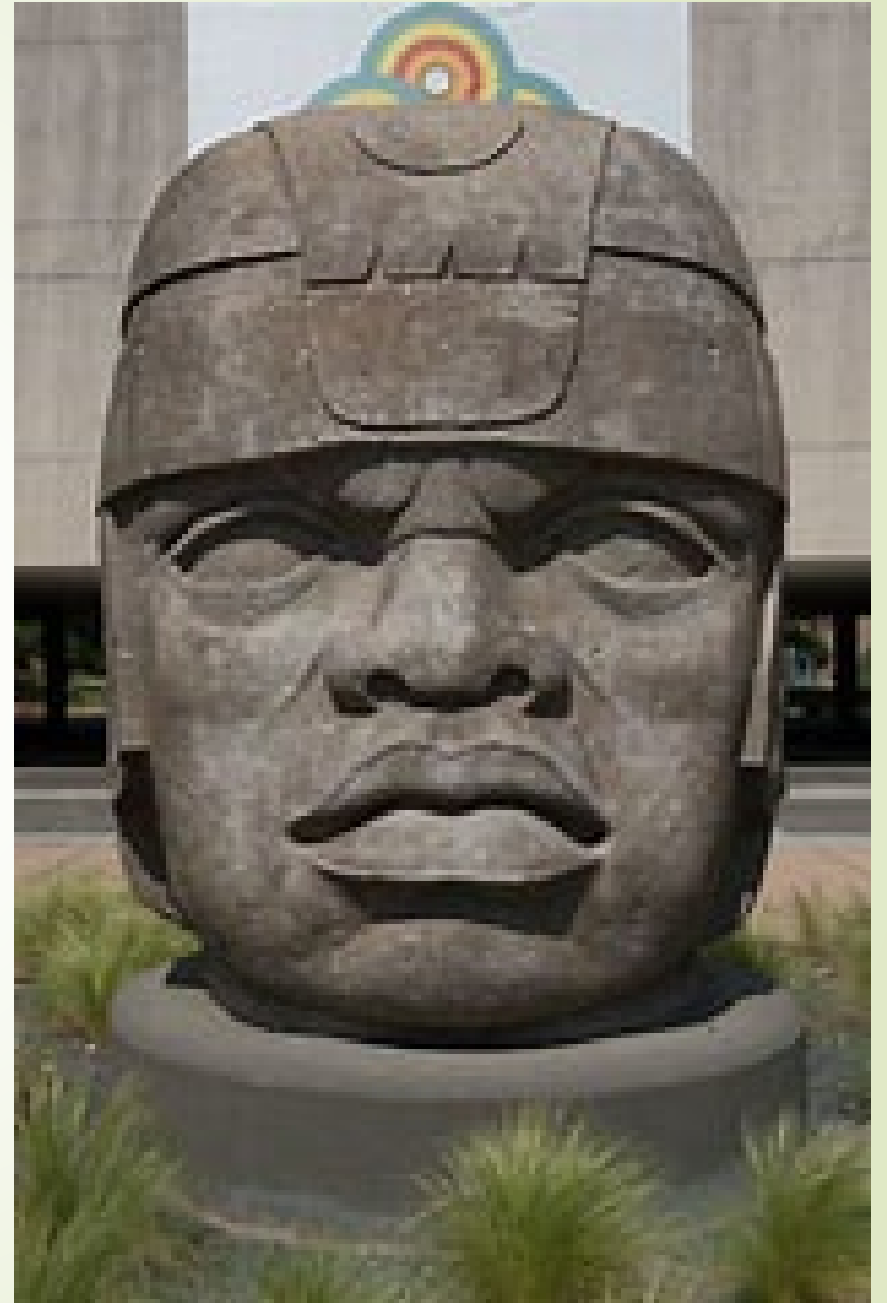
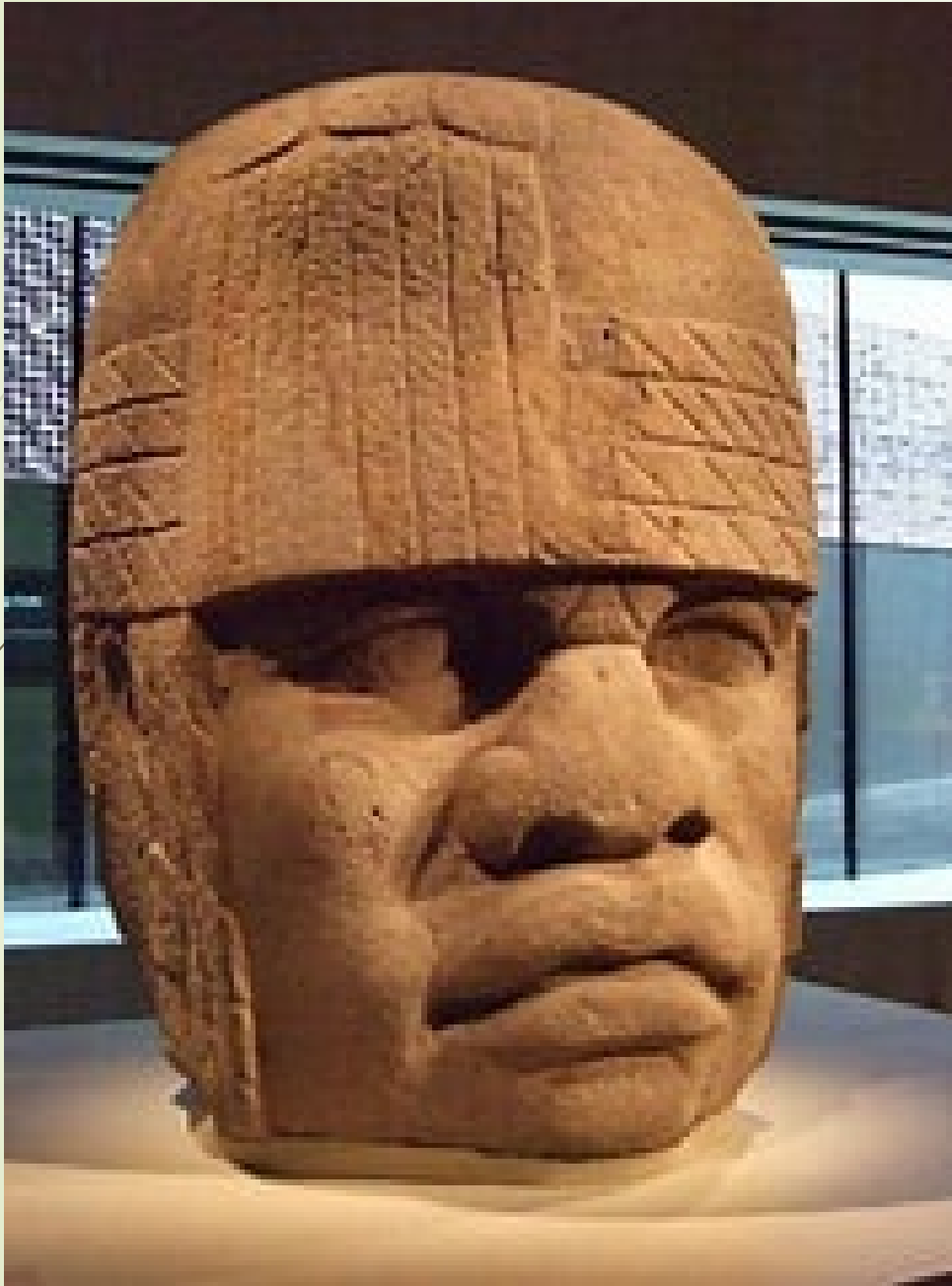
EL SALVADOR

NICARAGUA



The Olmec Civilization

- Time period was 1500-1000 BCE.
- They left behind a series of free-standing sculpted heads, carved from tons of basalt.
- They may have been representations of Olmec leaders and are wearing leather helmets of ball players or battle gear.
- This is linked to charisma and authority.
- These ball games may have been a substitute for war.





First Order Regimes

- First-order regimes use only one of the three elementary forms of domination:
 - The Olmec used charismatic politics and neglected the other two.
 - The Chavin in the Andes used knowledge control of shamanic journeys. They were a center of pilgrimage to seek visions and oracles. They had no military or fortifications.

First Order Regimes

- Natchez on the Mississippi River is another first-order “state” that relied entirely on sovereignty.
- It was centered on the Great Village which has two earthen platforms – one for the temple and one for the living quarters of the Great Sun and his family.
- The Great Sun had power of life and death, but little reach outside of the Great Village.
- It was also a matrilineal society.
- None were egalitarian.

Source: Grand Village of the Natchez Indians Museum



Predynastic Egypt

- This period was 4,000-3,100 BCE.
- There was less an emphasis on cereal agriculture and more on cattle – pastoral.
- There was a great emphasis on the human body and beautification.
- Mummification and body preservation started.
- Petty monarchs existed at various locations throughout the Nile valley and down into Nubia.
- Wheat beer and bread became in demand.

Egypt and Nubia



Egyptian Dynasties

- When sovereignty first expands to become the general organizing principal of a society, it is by turning to violence into kinship – ritual designed to produce kinship becomes a method of producing kingship.
- This was prevalent in the First Dynasty, especially at first, and ended abruptly with the Second Dynasty.
- The valley and the delta of the Nile were divided into royal estates, each dedicated to provisioning the mortuary cults of former rulers.



Egyptian Dynasties

- At this time the construction of the great pyramids at Giza took place using corvee labor (circa 2,500 BCE).
- The demand of the agro-economy and massive construction undertakings took administration of the land and labor.
- There was a period when central authority broke down (c. 2,181—2,055 BCE).
- This gave rise to heroic politics and much less bloodshed.

Second Order States

- Second order states combine two of the three elementary forms of domination (control of violence, control of knowledge, and charismatic power).
- Examples of these are:
 - Egypt's early rulers combined sovereignty and administration.
 - Mesopotamian kings mixed administration and heroic politics.
 - Classic Maya fused heroic politics with sovereignty.

Real Origins of Bureaucracy

- About 8,000 years ago in the village of Tell Sabi Abyad in Syria shows evidence of means of tracking grains in central storage.
- This was done by using geometric tokens that appeared in many Neolithic villages at the time.
- These bureaucratic methods may have been a means of preventing the amassing of wealth and keeping things more equal amongst the people.

Bureaucracy Run Amok

- The first establishment of bureaucratic empires is almost always accompanied by some kind of system of equivalence run amok.
- Overarching administrative structure can be largely extractive and exploitive as exemplified by the Inca.
- Similar things also occurred in the Middle East, China, and India.
- This is partly due to the fictions of legal equality.



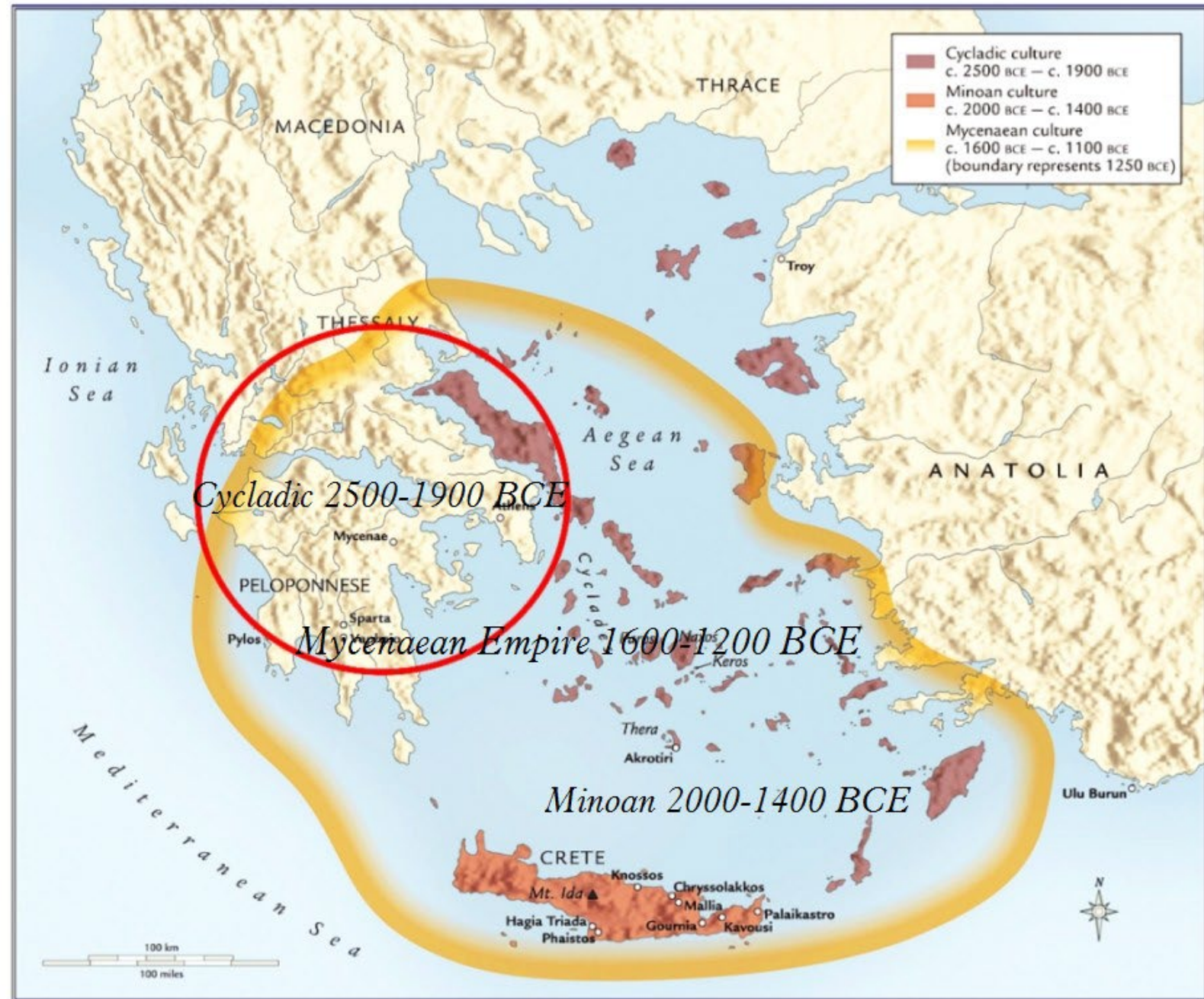
On Civilization

- Early civilizations were deeply stratified societies, held together by authoritarian government, violence, and the radical subordination of women.
- If civilization is based on mutual aid, social cooperation, civic activism, hospitality, or simply caring for others, we are not there yet.
- It seems only small communities formed civilizations based on a true sense of extended moral communities.

Minoan Crete


- Minoan Crete existed from 2,000 to 1,450 BC.
- Its major centers were Knossos, Phaestos, Malia, and Zakros.
- Knossos had a population of about 25,000 centering on large palace complexes with industrial quarters and storage facilities.
- There is no clear evidence of monarchy.
- Art depicts women conducting fertility rites, sitting on thrones, meeting in assemblies, and appear flanked by supernatural creatures and dangerous animals.

Extent of & Timeline of Three Bronze Age Civilizations





Minoan Crete


- Minoans were trading people and the traders were mostly men.
 - What they brought home were goods with a distinctly female flavor.
 - Cretan palaces were not fortified and art makes almost no reference to war.
 - Scenes were of play and attention to creature comforts.
 - They were conquered by the Mycenae.
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Chapter 11 – Full Circle

- This Chapter focuses on historical foundations of the indigenous critique of the European systems.
- The critique had deep questions it posed about money, faith, hereditary power, women's rights, and personal freedoms.
- They had enormous influence on leading figures of the French Enlightenment.
- This produced a backlash which produced an evolutionary framework for human history.




The Backlash

- This framework remains broadly intact even today.
 - The framework recast indigenous critics as innocent children of nature whose views on freedom were a side effect of their uncultured way of life.
 - Altering these European centric views is the point of the book.
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James Scott – The Grain Trap

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- Grain cultivation began with flood-retreat agriculture which was easy to work and encouraged redistribution.
 - Populations concentrated in river deltas and along fertile river valleys with flood pulses.
 - Grain was the ideal medium to serve as a basis of taxation.



James Scott – The Grain Trap

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- Grain cultivation predisposed the development of extractive states.
 - This fostered the development of permanent kingdom.
 - This process trapped these ‘grain states’ into areas that favored intensive agriculture.
 - The states were thus fragile and easy prey for the surrounding barbarians.

James Scott – The Grain Trap

- Monarchy was likely to have started in the 'heroic societies' surrounding the agricultural areas with urban-bureaucratic systems.
- Some barbarian monarchies were successful for short times (Alaric, Attila, Genghis, or Tamerlane).
- The Mongolian adage went 'One can conquer a kingdom on horseback, to rule it, one must dismount'.

Was all this Inevitable?

- The basic sequence is:
 - Band societies – small mobile groups of hunter-gatherers who were egalitarian.
 - Tribes – horticulturists. Mostly egalitarian, with leaders who have no coercive power. Totemic clan structures. Ritual or craft specialization.
 - Chiefdoms – kinship system with class structure. Surplus food production and full-time craft and ritual specialists.
 - States – intensive agriculture, legal monopoly on use of force, professional administration, and a complex division of labor.



Was all this Inevitable?

- The authors demonstrate throughout the book that this is a deceptive approach and this lockstep path of social evolution is incoherent.
- We will never know how the Americas may have evolved over time due to the Iberian invasion of the Americas and the European colonial empires.
- Ultimately there has been one political-economic system and it is global – the nation state based on industrial capitalism.



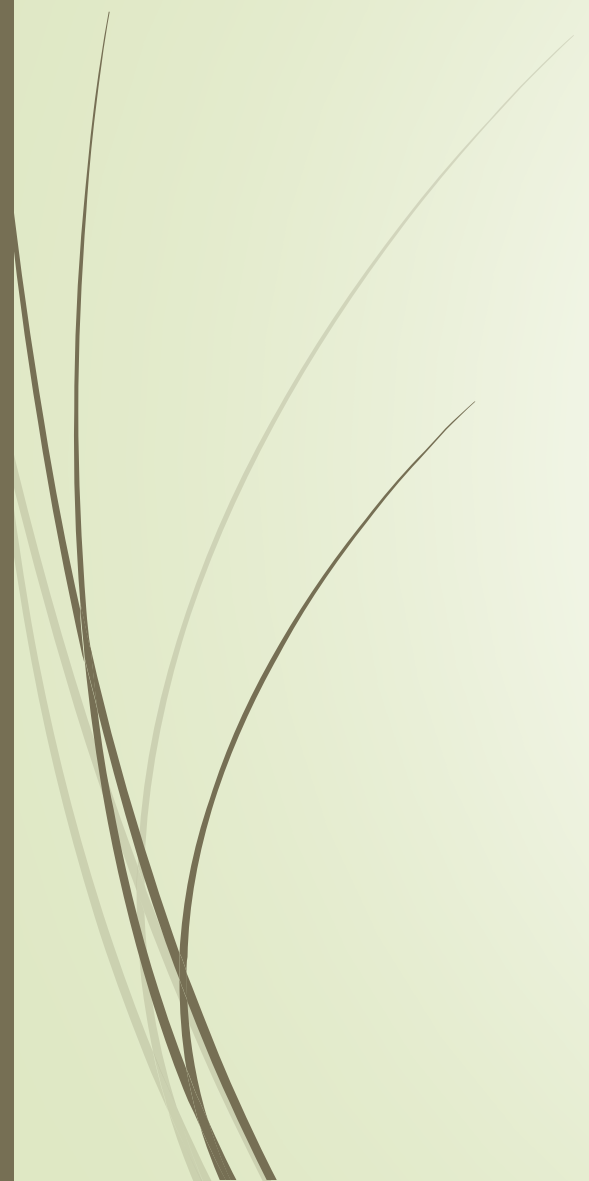
Hopewell Interaction Sphere

- Between 100 BCE and 500 CE was a period of active ties between all parts of the eastern woodlands.
- Communities in the network deposited treasures under burial mounds, mostly trade goods from all over the region.
- The clan system was extensive throughout.
- Hopewell ritual consisted of games and feasts.
- These tended against accumulation of wealth.

HOPEWELL INTERACTION SPHERE

& ASSOCIATED
LOCAL EXPRESSIONS



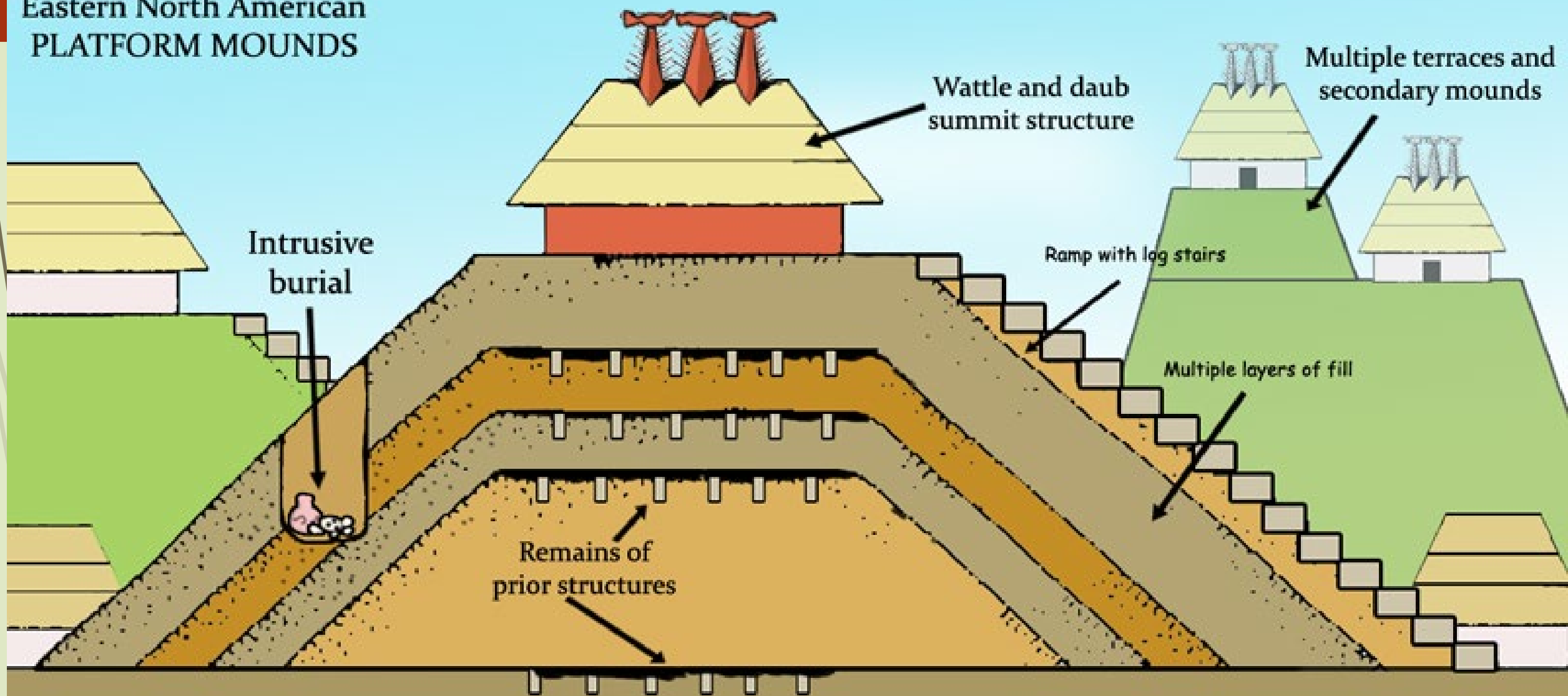


Cahokia

- From CE 1,050 – 1,350 the largest city in North America at that time.
- Largest example of Mississippian culture based on mound building and ritual (including lots of executions and burials – a second-order regime).
- Population peaked at about 15,000 people with a total of 40,000 in the bottomlands.
- It abruptly dissolved – probably due to a mix of issues with large groups of peoples at that time – ecological overuse, disease, and politics.



Eastern North American PLATFORM MOUNDS



Indigenous Politics

- ➔ Following the collapse of the Mississippian culture, people slowly filtered back into the valleys and organized communities on different principals.
- ➔ Tribal republics were formed based on egalitarian communal councils and operating by a process of consensus-building.
- ➔ Some see these egalitarian institutions as an outcome of self-conscious social movements.
- ➔ Smoking of tobacco and drinking caffeinated beverages was a big part of the discussions.

The Spirit of Laws

- The authors use the Osage as an example of the ability to adjusting their political structure until they achieved equity and covered contingencies such as war.
- They in no sense saw there social structure as something given from on high, but as a series of legal and intellectual discoveries.
- They achieved this on their own with no help from the Enlightenment. Although the reverse may be true.

The Spirit of Laws

- The Founding Fathers were familiar with Montesquieu's ideas and put them into practice.
- They attempted to create a constitution that would preserve the spirit of individual liberty and spoke of a 'government of law and not of man'.
- Have we all been trained into obedience and to ignore the core freedoms?



NEXT WEEK

- Read Chapter 12 – Conclusion
The Dawn of Everything