

Notes

1. FAREWELL TO HUMANITY'S CHILDHOOD

1. To take one example, Ian Morris's (2015) *Foragers, Farmers, and Fossil Fuels: How Human Values Evolve* sets itself the ambitious challenge of finding a uniform measure of inequality applicable across the entire span of human history, by translating the 'values' of Ice Age hunter-gatherers and Neolithic farmers into terms familiar to modern-day economists, and then using those to establish Gini coefficients (i.e. formal inequality rates). It's a laudable experiment, but one that quickly leads to some very odd conclusions. For instance, in a 2015 piece for the *New York Times*, Morris estimated the income of a Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer at \$1.10 a day, pegged to 1990 currency values. Where does this figure come from? Presumably it has something to do with the calorific value of daily food intake. But if we're comparing this to daily incomes today, wouldn't we also have to factor in all the other things Palaeolithic foragers got for free, but which we ourselves would expect to pay for: free security, free dispute resolution, free primary education, free care of the elderly, free medicine, not to mention entertainment costs, music, storytelling and religious services? Even when it comes to food, we must consider quality: after all, we're talking about 100 per cent organic free-range produce here, washed down with purest natural spring water. Much contemporary income goes to mortgages and rents. But consider the camping fees for prime Palaeolithic locations along the Dordogne or the Vézère, not to mention the high-end evening classes in naturalistic rock-painting and ivory-carving – and all those fur coats. Surely all this must cost wildly in excess of \$1.10 a day. As we'll see in [Chapter Four](#), it's not for nothing that anthropologists sometimes refer to foragers as 'the original affluent society'. Such a life today would not come cheap. Admittedly, this is all a bit silly, but that's really

our point: if one reduces world history to Gini coefficients, silly things will, necessarily, follow.

2. Fukuyama 2011: 43, 53–4.
3. Diamond 2012: 10–15.
4. Fukuyama 2011: 48.
5. Diamond 2012: 11.
6. In the case of Fukuyama and Diamond one can, at least, note that they were never trained in the relevant disciplines (the first is a political scientist, the other has a PhD on the physiology of the gall bladder). Still, even when anthropologists, archaeologists and historians try their hand at ‘big-picture’ narratives, they have an odd tendency to end up with some similarly minor variation on Rousseau. Flannery and Marcus’s (2012) *The Creation of Inequality: How our Prehistoric Ancestors Set the Stage for Monarchy, Slavery, and Empire*, for example, offers all sorts of interesting insights into how inequality *might* emerge in human societies, but their overall framing of human history remains explicitly wedded to Rousseau’s second *Discourse*, concluding that humanity’s best hope of a more egalitarian future is to ‘put hunters and gatherers in charge’. Walter Scheidel’s more economically informed study, *The Great Leveller: Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-First Century* (2017), concludes – just as dismally – that there’s really nothing we can do about inequality: civilization invariably puts in charge a small elite who grab more and more of the pie, and the only thing that has ever been successful in dislodging them is catastrophe in the form of war, plague, mass conscription, wholesale suffering and death. Half-measures never work. So if you don’t want to go back to living in a cave, or die in a nuclear holocaust (which presumably also ends up with the survivors in caves), you’re just going to have to accept the existence of Warren Buffett and Bill Gates.
7. Rousseau 1984 [1754]: 78.
8. As articulated by Judith Shklar (1964), the renowned Harvard political theorist.

9. Rousseau 1984 [1754].: 122.
10. As a matter of fact, Rousseau, unlike Hobbes, was not a fatalist. For Hobbes, all things large and small in history were to be understood as the unfolding of forces set in motion by God, which are ultimately beyond the capacity of humans to control (see Hunter 1989). Even a tailor making a garment is entering, from his first stitch, into a flow of historical entanglements that he is powerless to resist and of which he is largely unaware; his precise actions are tiny links in a great chain of causality that is the very fabric of human history, and – in this rather extreme metaphysics of entanglement – to suggest that he might have been doing these things some alternative way is to deny the whole, irreversible course of world history. For Rousseau, by contrast, what humans make, they could always unmake, or at least do differently. We could free ourselves from the chains that bind us; it just wasn't going to be easy (see, again, Shklar 1964 for a classic discussion of this aspect of Rousseau's thought).
11. Pinker 2012: 39, 43.
12. If a trace of impatience can be detected in our presentation, the reason is this: so many contemporary authors seem to enjoy imagining themselves as modern-day counterparts to the great social philosophers of the Enlightenment, men like Hobbes and Rousseau, playing out the same grand dialogue but with a more accurate cast of characters. That dialogue in turn is drawn from the empirical findings of social scientists, including archaeologists and anthropologists like ourselves. Yet in fact the quality of their empirical generalizations is hardly better; in some ways it's probably worse. At some point, you have to take the toys back from the children.
13. Pinker 2012; 2018.
14. Pinker 2012: 42.
15. Tilley 2015.
16. Formicola 2007.
17. Margaret Mead did this once, when she suggested that the first sign of 'civilization' in human history was not tool use but a

15,000-year-old skeleton that showed signs of having healed from a broken femur. It takes six weeks, she noted, to recover from such an injury; most animals with broken femurs simply die because their companions abandon them; one of the things that makes humans so unusual is precisely that we take care of one another in such situations.

18. Below, n.21. As others point out, Yanomami tend to sleep together six to even ten people in the same bed. This requires a degree of good-natured mutual accommodation of which few contemporary social theorists would be capable. If they were really anything like the ‘fierce savages’ of undergraduate caricature, there would be no Yanomami as they’d all have long since killed each other for snoring.
19. In reality, far from being pristine exemplars of our ‘ancestral condition’, the Yanomami in the 1960s to 1980s, when Chagnon conducted fieldwork among them, had been exposed to decades of European incursions, intensified by the discovery of gold on their lands. Over that period, Yanomami populations were decimated by epidemics of infectious diseases introduced by missionaries, prospectors, anthropologists and government agents; see Kopenawa and Albert 2013: 2–3.
20. Chagnon 1988.
21. Some were about the statistics Chagnon presented, and his claim that men who achieved a state of ritual purity (*unokai*) obtained more wives and offspring than others. A key issue here, which Chagnon never entirely cleared up, is that *unokai* status was not reserved for men who had killed; it could also be achieved, for example, by shooting an arrow into the corpse of an enemy already slain, or indeed by causing death through non-physical means, such as sorcery. Others pointed out that most *unokai* were on the older side of the age spectrum, and some held the status of village headmen: both would have ensured more offspring, with no direct relationship to warfare. Still others pointed out a logical flaw in Chagnon’s suggestion that homicide acted both as deterrent to further killing (the *unokai* having earned a fierce reputation), and at the same time kept in motion a cycle of

revenge killings on the part of embittered kinsmen: a kind of ‘war of all against all’. Criticisms of Chagnon: Albert 1989; Ferguson 1989; and see Chagnon 1990 for a response.

22. Geertz 2001. Academics are very prone to a phenomenon called ‘schismogenesis’, which we will be exploring at various points in this book.
23. The framers of the US Constitution, for example, were quite explicitly anti-democratic and made clear in their own public statements that they designed the Federal Government in large part to head off the risk of ‘democracy’ breaking out in one of the former colonies (they were particularly worried about Pennsylvania). Meanwhile, actual direct democratic decision-making had been practised regularly in various parts of Africa or Amazonia, or for that matter in Russian or French peasant assemblies, for thousands of years; see Graeber 2007b.
24. For example, one would not have to waste one’s time coming up with convoluted reasons why, say, forms of decision-making that look like democracy outside Europe are not ‘really’ democracy, philosophical arguments about nature that take rigorous logical form are not ‘really’ science, etc.
25. Chagnon (1998: 990) chose to end his famous *Science* paper with an anecdote to this very effect: ‘A particularly acute insight into the power of law to thwart killing for revenge was provided to me by a young Yanomamö man in 1987. He had been taught Spanish by missionaries and sent to the territorial capital for training in practical nursing. There he discovered police and laws. He excitedly told me that he had visited the town’s largest *pata* [the territorial governor] and urged him to make law and police available to his people so that they would not have to engage any longer in their wars of revenge and have to live in constant fear.’
26. Pinker 2012: 54.
27. As recounted by Valero to Ettore Biocca and published in 1965 under the latter’s authorship.
28. For which, see the evidence compiled in a (1977) thesis by J. N. Heard: ‘The Assimilation of Captives on the American Frontier in

the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’.

29. In his (1782) *Letters from an American Farmer* J. Hector St John de Crèvecoeur noted how parents, at the end of a war, would visit Indian towns to reclaim their children: ‘To their inexpressible sorrow, they found them so completely Indianized, that many knew them no longer, and those whose more advanced ages permitted them to recollect their fathers and mothers, absolutely refused to follow them, and ran to their adopted parents for protection against the effusions of love their unhappy real parents lavished upon them.’ (cited in Heard 1977: 55–6, who also notes Crèvecoeur’s conclusion that the Indians must possess a ‘social bond singularly captivating, and far superior to anything to be boasted of among us’.)
30. Franklin 1961 [1753]: 481–3.
31. ‘Alas! Alas!’ wrote James Willard Schultz – an eighteen-year-old from a prominent New York family who married into the Blackfoot, remaining with them until they were driven on to a reservation – ‘Why could not this simple life have continued? Why must the ... swarms of settlers have invaded that wonderful land, and robbed its lords of all that made life worth living? They knew not care, nor hunger, nor want of any kind. From my window here, I hear the roar of the great city, and see the crowds hurrying by ... “bound to the wheel” and there is no escape from it except by death. And this is civilization! I, for one, maintain that there is no ... happiness in it. The Indians of the plains ... alone knew what was perfect content and happiness, and that, we are told, is the chief end and aim of men – to be free from want, and worry, and care. Civilization will never furnish it, except to the very, very few.’ (Schultz 1935: 46; see also Heard 1977: 42)
32. See Heard 1977: 44, with references.
33. For example, the Wendat (‘Huron’) societies of Northeastern North America in the seventeenth century – to which we turn in the next chapter – of whom Trigger (1976: 62) notes that: ‘Relations of friendship and material reciprocity were extended beyond the Huron confederacy in the form of trading arrangements. In the historic period, trade was a source not only

of luxury goods but of meat and skins which were vital to a population that had outstripped the resources of its nearby hunting territory. Important as these goods were, however, foreign trade was not merely an economic activity. It was embedded in a network of social relations that were, fundamentally, *extensions of the friendly relationships* that existed within the Huron confederacy.’ (Our emphasis.) For a general anthropological survey of ‘archaic trade’ the classic source remains Servet 1981; 1982. Most contemporary archaeologists are well aware of this literature, but tend to get caught up in debates over the difference between ‘trade’ and ‘gift exchange’, while assuming that the ultimate point of both is to enhance somebody’s status, either by profit, or by prestige, or both. Most will also acknowledge that there is something inherently valuable, even cosmologically significant, in the phenomenon of travel, the experience of remote places or the acquisition of exotic materials; but in the last resort, much of this too seems to come down to questions of status or prestige, as if no other possible motivation might exist for people interacting over long distances; for some further discussion of the issues see Wengrow 2010b.

34. On ‘dream economies’ among the Iroquois see Graeber 2001: 145–9.
35. Following Charles Hudson’s (1976: 89–91) interpretation of Cabeza de Vaca’s account.
36. DeBoer 2001.

2. WICKED LIBERTY

1. In his (2009) *Europe Through Arab Eyes, 1578–1727*, Nabil Matar considers the relative lack of interest in Frankish Europe among medieval Muslim writers, and possible reasons for it (especially, pp. 6–18).
2. Many examples of this tendency are discussed in David Allen Harvey’s (2012) *The French Enlightenment and its Others*.
3. A notorious example was that of Christian Wolff, the most famous German philosopher in the period between Leibniz and

Kant – he too was a Sinophile and lectured on the superiority of Chinese modes of government, with the ultimate effect that an envious colleague denounced him to the authorities, a warrant was issued for his arrest and he was forced to flee for his life.

4. Some classic statements, especially concerning North America, are to be found in: Chinard 1913; Healy 1958; Berkhofer 1978a, 1978b; Dickason 1984; McGregor 1988; Cro 1990; Pagden 1993; Sayre 1997; Franks 2002.
5. For example, Grinde 1977; Johansen 1982, 1998; Sioui 1992; Levy 1996; Tooker 1988; 1990; and cf. Graeber 2007b. The literature, however, focuses around the impact of Native ideas on American colonists, and has become bogged down in an argument about the specific ‘influence’ of the Haudenosaunee political confederation on the American Constitution. The original argument was actually much broader, suggesting that European settlers in the Americas only came to think of themselves as ‘Americans’ (rather than English or French or Dutch) when they began to adopt certain elements of Native American standards and sensibilities, from the indulgent treatment of children to ideals of republican self-governance.
6. Alfani and Frigeni 2016.
7. The best English-language source on these debates is Pagden 1986.
8. One of Rousseau’s rivals in the essay contest, the Marquis d’Argenson, who also failed to win a prize, made precisely this argument: monarchy allowed the truest equality, he argued, and absolutist monarchy most of all, since everyone is equal before the absolute power of the king.
9. Lovejoy and Boas (1935) compile and provide commentary on all the relevant texts.
10. As Barbara Alice Mann suggests to us (in personal communication), bourgeois women may have especially appreciated the *Jesuit Relations* because it allowed them to read about discussions of women’s sexual freedom in a form that was entirely acceptable to the Church.

11. David Allen Harvey (2012: 75–6), for instance, places Lahontan’s *Dialogues* (to which we shortly turn) in a literary class with works by Diderot and Rousseau, writers who had little if any direct experience of Native American peoples but invoked them as a ‘discursively constructed Other with which to interrogate European customs and civilization’. See also Pagden 1983; 1993.
12. It rarely seems to occur to anyone that (1) there are only so many logical arguments one *can* make, and intelligent people in similar circumstances will come up with similar rhetorical approaches, and (2) it is likely that European writers trained in the classics would be especially impressed by arguments that reminded them of ones they already knew from Greek or Roman rhetoric. Obviously, such accounts do not provide a direct window on to the original conversations, but to insist that they bear no relation at all seems equally absurd.
13. Technically, the Huron were a confederation of Iroquoian speakers that existed at the time the French arrived, but later scattered under attacks from the Haudenosaunee to the south and then reformed as the Wyandot or Wendat, along with refugees from the Petun and Neutral confederations. Their contemporary descendants prefer Wendat (pronounced ‘Wen-dot’), noting that ‘Huron’ was originally an insult, meaning (depending on the source) either ‘pig-haired’ or ‘malodorous’. Sources at the time regularly use ‘Huron’, and while we have followed Barbara Mann’s usage in changing it to ‘Wendat’ when quoting from indigenous speakers like Kandiaronk, we have maintained it in European sources.
14. Biard 1611: 173 –4, cited in Ellingson 2001: 51.
15. The Recollects were a branch of the Franciscan Order, who took vows of poverty and were among the first missionaries dispatched to New France.
16. Sagard 1939 [1632]: 192.
17. *Ibid.*: 88–9.
18. Wallace 1958; cf. also Graeber 2001, Chapter Five.

19. *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610–1791*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites, and henceforth: *JR* 6: 109–10/241. The phrase ‘captain’ is used indiscriminately in the French sources for any male in a position of authority, whether that person be a simple headman of a band or village, or the holder of an official rank in the Wendat or Haudenosaunee Confederation.
20. *JR* 28: 47.
21. *JR* 28: 48–9, cf. *JR* 10: 211–21.
22. *JR* 28: 49–50. Here’s a different Jesuit father, returning to the donkey theme again: ‘There is nothing so difficult as to control the tribes of America. All these barbarians have the law of wild asses, – they are born, live, and die in a liberty without restraint; they do not know what is meant by bridle or bit. With them, to conquer one’s passions is considered a great joke, while to give free rein to the senses is a lofty philosophy. The Law of our Lord is far removed from this dissoluteness; it gives us boundaries and prescribes limits, outside of which we cannot step without offending God and reason.’ (*JR* 12:191–2).
23. *JR* 5: 175.
24. *JR* 33: 49.
25. *JR* 28: 61–2.
26. *JR* 15:155, also in Franks 2002: 4; cf. Blackburn 2000: 68.
27. They were also unevenly accepted. Most Jesuits still subscribed to the old Renaissance doctrine that ‘savages’ had once been of a higher level of grace and of civilization, and had degenerated (Blackburn 2000: 69).
28. A comprehensive review of the literature by Ellingson (2001) finds the view that European observers regularly romanticized those they considered savages to be entirely unfounded; even the most positive accounts tended to be fairly nuanced, recognizing both virtues and vices.

29. So according to some sources at the time, and Wendat oral traditions (Steckley 1981).
30. The official histories claim that he converted at the very end of his life, and it's true he was buried as a Christian in Notre-Dame Church in Montreal, but Mann argues convincingly that the story of the deathbed conversion and burial is likely to have been a mere political ploy on the part of the missionaries (Mann 2001: 53).
31. Chinard 1931; Allan 1966; Richter 1972; Betts 1984: 129–36; Ouellet 1990, 1995; White 1991; Basile 1997; Sayre 1997; Muthu 2003: 25–9; Pinette 2006; but for a significant exception see Hall 2003: 160 ff.
32. Sioui 1972, 1992, 1999; Steckley 1981, 2014: 56–62; Mann 2001.
33. Mann 2001: 55.
34. Ibid.: 57–61.
35. 1704: 106–7. Cited references are to the 1735 English edition of *Dialogues*, but the translation in this instance is a combination of that, Mann's (2001: 67–8), and our own. Subsequent translations are our own, based on the 1735 edition.
36. 'Assuming he is so powerful and great, how likely is it that such an unknowable being would have made himself into a man, dwelt in misery, and died in infamy, just to work off the sin of some ignoble creature who was as far beneath him as a fly is beneath the sun and the stars? Where does that leave his infinite power? What good would it do him, and what use would he make of it? For my part, it seems to me that to believe in a debasement of this nature is to doubt the unimaginable sweep of his omnipotence, while making extravagant presumptions about ourselves.' (cited in Mann 2001: 66)
37. Bateson 1935; 1936.
38. Sahlins 1999: 402, 414.
39. Allan 1966: 95.

40. Ouellet 1995: 328. After a hiatus, another spate of similar plays with Indian heroes were produced in the 1760s: *La Jeune Indienne* (1764) by Chamfort and *Le Huron* (1768) by Marmontel.
41. See Harvey (2012) for a good recent summary of the impact of foreign perspectives, real and imagined, on social thinking in the French Enlightenment.
42. The expression is Pagden's (1983).
43. So, Etienne 1876; cf. Kavanagh 1994. In 1752, just around the time de Graffigny's second edition appeared, a former soldier, spy and theatre director named Jean Henri Maubert de Gouvest also released a novel called *Lettres Iroquois*, the correspondence of an imaginary Iroquois traveller named Igli, which was also hugely successful.
44. 'Without gold, it is impossible to acquire a part of this earth which nature has given in common to all men. Without possessing what they call property, it is impossible to have gold, and by an inconsistency which is an outrage to natural common sense, and which exasperates one's reason, this haughty nation, following an empty code of honour entirely of its own invention, considers it a disgrace to receive from anyone other than the sovereign whatever is necessary to sustain one's life and position.' (de Graffigny 2009 [1747]: 58).
45. Meek 1976: 70–71. Turgot was writing on the eve of the Industrial Revolution. Later evolutionists would simply replace 'industrial' with 'commercial'. No pastoral society actually existed in the New World, but somehow early evolutionists never seemed to consider this a problem.
46. It is to be noted that the question is framed in traditional terms: the arts and sciences are assumed not to progress, but rather still to be in the process of being restored to their former (presumably ancient) glory. It was only over the course of the next decade that notions of progress became widely accepted.
47. This is the third footnote of the *Discourse on the Arts & Sciences*, sometimes referred to as 'The First Discourse'.

Montaigne's essay 'On Cannibals', written in 1580, appears to be the first to consider indigenous American perspectives on European societies, with Tupinamba visitors questioning the arbitrariness of royal authority and wondering why the homeless did not burn down the mansions of the rich. The fact that so many societies appeared to maintain peace and social order without coercive institutions or even, it seemed, formal institutions of government of any kind caught the attention of European observers from very early on. Leibniz, for instance, who, as we've seen, had long been promoting Chinese models of bureaucracy as the embodiment of rational statecraft, felt this was what was really significant in Lahontan's testimony: the possibility that statecraft might not be required at all (Ouellet 1995: 323).

48. Rousseau 1984 [1754]: 109.
49. Rousseau described himself as an avid reader of travelogues and does cite Lebeau, who is basically summarizing Lahontan, as well as *l'Arlequin sauvage* (Allan 1966: 97–8; Muthu 2003: 12–13, 25–8; Pagden 1983: 33). It's extremely unlikely that Rousseau had not read Lahontan in the original, though even if he hadn't it would just mean that he had come by the same arguments second-hand.
50. Other examples: 'The cultivation of the earth necessarily brought about its distribution; and property, once recognised, gave rise to the first rules of justice; for, to secure each man his own, it had to be possible for each to have something. Besides, as men began to look forward to the future, and all had something to lose, every one had reason to apprehend that reprisals would follow any injury he might do to another.' Compare that passage to Kandiaronk's argument, cited above, that the Wendat intentionally avoided divisions of wealth because they had no desire to create a coercive legal system. Montesquieu made the same point in discussing the Osage, noting that 'the division of lands is what principally increases the civil code. Among nations where they have not made this division there are very few civil laws' – an observation which seems to have been derived partly from

Montesquieu's conversation with members of an Osage delegation that visited Paris in 1725 (Burns 2004: 362).

51. See Graeber 2011: 203–7.
52. Rousseau himself had fled home at an early age, writing to his Swiss watchmaker father that he aspired to live 'without the help of others'.
53. Barruel 1799: 104. The quote is from an anti-Illuminati tract, claiming to be the 'Code of the Illuminati', and this whole discourse is so shrouded in rumour and accusation that we can't even be entirely sure our sources didn't just make it up; but in a way it hardly matters, since the main point is that the right wing saw Rousseauian ideas as inspiring leftist revolutionary activity.
54. It is not entirely clear whether 'Illuminism' as it came to be called was a revolutionary doctrine at all, since Weishaupt himself later denied it – after the society was banned and he was himself driven from Bavaria – and characterized it as purely reformist; but his enemies of course insisted these protests were disingenuous.
55. The key difference is that Rousseau sees progress as undermining an essentially benevolent human nature, while classic conservative thought tends to see it as having undermined traditional mores and forms of authority which had previously been able to contain the less benevolent aspects of human nature.
56. Certainly, there *is* a tendency, in all this literature, when introduced to unfamiliar societies, to treat them alternately as entirely good or entirely evil. Columbus was already doing this in the 1490s. All we're saying here is that this does not mean that nothing they ever said had any bearing on the actual perspectives of those they encountered.
57. Chinard 1913: 186, translation following Ellingson 2001: 383. A similar passage: 'Rebel against all constraints, all laws, all hierarchies, the baron Lahontan and his American savage are anarchists properly speaking. *The Dialogues with a Savage* are neither a political treatise nor a learned dissertation, they are the clarion call of a revolutionary journalist; Lahontan opens the way

not just for Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but for Father Duchesne and the modern socialist revolutionaries, and all that just ten years before the death of Louis XIV.’ (1913: 185, translation ours).

58. Ellingson 2001: 383.
59. The construction ‘our own’ of course presumes that Native Americans don’t read books, or those that do don’t matter.
60. Chinard 1913: 214.
61. ‘His imagination paints no pictures; his heart makes no demands on him. His few wants are so readily supplied, and he is so far from having the knowledge which is needful to make him want more, that he can have neither foresight nor curiosity ... His soul, which nothing disturbs, is wholly wrapped up in the feeling of its present existence, without any idea of the future, however near at hand; while his projects, as limited as his views, hardly extend to the close of day. Such, even at present, is the extent of the native Caribbean’s foresight: he will improvidently sell you his cotton-bed in the morning, and come crying in the evening to buy it again, not having foreseen he would want it again the next night.’ (Rousseau 1984 [1754]: 90).
62. ‘Fraternity’ might seem the odd man out here, at least insofar as Native American influences go – though a case can be made that it echoes the responsibility for mutual aid and support which American observers so often remarked on. Montesquieu in *The Spirit of the Laws* makes a great point of the sense of fraternal commitment among the Osage, and his book was a powerful influence on the political theorists of both the American and French Revolutions; as we’ll see in [Chapter Eleven](#), Montesquieu himself appears to have met with an Osage delegation visiting Paris and his observations may be based on direct communication with them (Burns 2004: 38, 362).
63. In the sense that women controlled land and its produce and also most other productive resources, but men controlled most of the important political offices.

3. UNFREEZING THE ICE AGE

1. The authoritative account, well into the nineteenth century, was that of James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, first published in 1650, though it is important to note that none other than Sir Isaac Newton proposed an alternative calculation, suggesting the actual date was 3988 BC.
2. The phrase we owe to Thomas Trautmann's (1992) account of this 'time revolution'. While the field of anthropology came into existence during the 'decade of Darwin' (i.e. between the publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859 and *The Descent of Man* in 1871), it was not actually Darwinism but archaeological excavations that established the timescale of human prehistory as we know it. Geology paved the way, replacing the biblically inspired view of earth's genesis as a series of rapid titanic upheavals with a more mechanistic and gradual account of our planet's origins. More detailed studies of the early development of scientific prehistory, and how fossil evidence and stone tools were first fitted into this expanded chronology of life on earth, can be found in Schnapp 1993 and Trigger 2006.
3. The key findings are summarized in Scerri et al. 2018. For an accessible account see also Scerri's feature article in *New Scientist*, published online (25 April 2018) as 'Origin of our species: why humans were once so much more diverse'.
4. The Sahara seems to have acted as a kind of turnstile for human evolution, periodically turning green and then dry again with the cyclical advance/retreat of monsoon rains, opening and shutting the gates of interaction between northern and southern parts of the African continent (see Scerri 2017).
5. Geneticists assume, reasonably enough, that a fair amount of genetic admixture did take place.
6. Green et al. 2010; Reich et al. 2010. Fossil evidence tells us that the first expansions of modern humans out of Africa began as far back as 210,000 years ago (Harvati et al. 2019), but these were often tentative and quite short-lived, at least until the more decisive radiations of our species began around 60,000 BC.
7. Recent and historical hunter-gatherers, as we shall see, present an enormous range of possibilities, from assertively egalitarian

groups like the Ju/ 'hoansi of the Kalahari, the Mbendjele BaYaka of Congo or the Agta in the Philippines to assertively hierarchical ones like the populations of the Canadian Northwest Coast, the Calusa of Florida Keys or the forest-dwelling Guaicurú of Paraguay (these latter groups, far from being egalitarian, are known to have traditionally kept slaves and lived in ranked societies). Holding up any particular subset of recent foragers as representatives of 'early human society' is essentially a matter of picking cherries.

8. Hrdy 2009.
9. Will, Conard and Tryon 2019, with further references.
10. For important reviews and critiques of the 'Human Revolution' idea see McBrearty and Brooks 2000; Mellars et al. 2007.
11. The term 'Venus figurine' is still widely used, but has links to scientific racism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when direct comparisons were drawn between prehistoric images and the anatomy of modern individuals considered living specimens of humanity in its 'primitive' forms. A tragic example is the life story of Sara Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman who was exhibited around Europe as a 'freak' owing to her large buttocks under the stage name 'Hottentot Venus'. See Cook 2015.
12. Renfrew 2007.
13. The case against European exceptionalism was laid out by Sally McBrearty and Alison Brooks in a key (2000) publication; and has since been supplemented by discoveries in South Asia (James and Petraglia 2005) and Africa (Deino et al. 2018).
14. Shipton et al. 2018.
15. Aubert et al. 2018.
16. Conceivably this included the making of cave art; Hoffmann et al. 2018.
17. Recent efforts to estimate the overall human population at the start of the Upper Palaeolithic (known as the Aurignacian period) suggest a mean figure of just 1,500 people for the whole of

western and central Europe, which is remarkably low; Schmidt and Zimmermann 2019.

18. For the relationship between demographic density and enhanced cultural transmission in Upper Palaeolithic Europe see the (2009) arguments of Powell, Shennan and Thomas.
19. This is obviously only a last resort and usually extreme measures are employed to ensure it's really called for: in rural Madagascar, for instance, when police were effectively absent, the usual rule was that one could only lynch such a person if his parents gave permission first – which was usually effective as a way to simply drive the person out of town. (D. Graeber, field observation.)
20. Boehm 1999: 3–4.
21. Initially, but as it turns out wrongly thought to be a boy and girl; for new genetic evidence on this point see Sikora et al. 2017.
22. Again, modern genetic studies of the group burial at Dolní Věstonice have confirmed the male identity of all three burials, which was previously in doubt; Mittnik 2016.
23. Evidence from these various sites is usefully summarized and evaluated in Pettitt 2011, with further references; and see also Wengrow and Graeber 2015.
24. See e.g. White 1999; Vanhaeren and D'Errico 2005. Inheritance is hardly the only possible explanation for the association of wealth with children: in many societies where wealth circulates freely (for instance, where it's socially impossible to refuse a request to hand over one's necklace or bracelet to an admirer), a lot of ornament ends up festooning children to keep it out of circulation. If elaborate ornaments were buried in part to take them out of circulation, so as not to create invidious distinctions, burying them with children might be the ideal way to accomplish this.
25. Schmidt 2006; and for a convenient digest see also <https://www.dainst.blog/the-tepe-telegrams/>
26. As ventured by Haklay and Gopher 2020, based on geometrical regularities and correspondences found among the ground plans of some three large enclosures; but doubts remain, as their study

does not take into account the complex and dynamic construction sequences that lie behind the enclosures, and compares building phases that are not strictly contemporaneous.

27. Acemoğlu and Robinson 2009: 679; and see also Dietrich et al. 2019; Flannery and Marcus 2012: 128–31.
28. For the monumental character of mammoth structures in their Ice Age settings see Soffer 1985; Iakovleva 2015: 325, 333. As we note below, current research by Mikhail Sablin, Natasha Reynolds and colleagues shows that the term ‘mammoth houses’ or ‘dwellings’ may well be misleading in some cases; in fact, the precise functions of these impressive structures may have varied considerably across regions and periods (see also Pryor et al. 2020). For the massive wooden enclosures as evidence of large, seasonal gatherings see Zheltova 2015.
29. Sablin, Reynolds, Iltsevich and Germonpré (manuscript in preparation; made available to us by courtesy of Natasha Reynolds).
30. Ibid.
31. In fact, even small children are typically far more imaginative than this, and as we all know spend a considerable part of their time constructing alternative roles and symbolic worlds to inhabit. Robert L. Kelly, in his magisterial survey of the ‘foraging spectrum’, offered a clear statement of the problem concerning the stereotyping of forager populations, urging a study of ‘hunter-gatherer prehistory in terms other than broad typological contrasts such as generalized versus specialized, simple versus complex, storing versus non-storing, or immediate versus delayed return’ (2013: 274). Still, we note that in the main part of his study Kelly himself maintains just such a broad dichotomy between ‘egalitarian’ and ‘non-egalitarian’ hunter-gatherers as distinct types of society with supposedly fixed internal characteristics (tabulated as a binary contrast between ‘simple versus complex’ forms; Kelly 2013: 242, table 9-1).
32. The British historian Keith Thomas, for instance, compiled a whole list of casual rejections of Christianity from medieval and Renaissance English sources. ‘The Bishop of Exeter complained

in 1600 that in his diocese it was “a matter very common to dispute whether there be a God or not” ... In Essex a husbandman of Bradwell-near-the-Sea was said to “hold his opinion that all things cometh by nature, and does affirm this as an atheist” ... At Wing, Rutland, in 1633 Richard Sharpe was accused of saying “there is no God and that he hath no soul to save”. From Durham in 1635 came the case of Brian Walker who, when asked if he did not fear God, retorted that, “I do not believe there is either God or Devil; neither will I believe anything but what I see”: as an alternative to the Bible he commended “the book called Chaucer” (1978: 202). The difference of course is that while expressing such opinions among the Winnebago might make you a figure of fun, under the government of Queen Elizabeth or King James it could get you into serious trouble – as evidenced by the fact that we know most of these people because of trial documents.

33. Beidelman 1971: 391–2. The account assumes that prophets are male but there are documented cases of female prophets as well. Douglas Johnson (1997) provides the definitive history of Nuer prophets in the early twentieth century.
34. Lévi-Strauss 1967 [1944]: 61.
35. Lee and Devore 1968: 11. It’s worth noting, perhaps, that Lévi-Strauss offered a forlorn epilogue to *Man the Hunter*, which is not read any more.
36. Formicola (2007) surveys the evidence; and see also Trinkaus 2018; Trinkaus and Buzhilova 2018.
37. This is the general pattern (Pettitt 2011). Of course, it is not completely universal – the Romito dwarf, for example, does not seem to have been buried with grave goods.
38. Archaeologists have observed close spatial associations between large Upper Palaeolithic (Magdalenian) aggregation sites in the French Périgord and natural choke points or ‘bottlenecks’ along the Dordogne and Vézère such as fords or meanders: ideal locations for intercepting herds of reindeer on their seasonal migrations (White 1985). In northern Spain, the famous cave sites of Altamira and Castillo have long been identified as aggregation

locales based on their topographical location and the preponderance of seasonal resources like deer, ibex and shellfish among the animal remains found there (Straus 1977). On the periglacial ‘mammoth steppe’ of Central Russia, spectacularly large settlements like Mezhirich and Mezin – with their mammoth-bone dwellings, fixed storage pits and abundant evidence of art and trade – were aligned on major river systems (Dnepr and Desna), which also channelled the annual north–south movements of steppe bison, horse, reindeer and mammoth (Soffer 1985). Similarly, the Pavlov Hills of southern Moravia, where Dolní Věstonice is located, once formed part of a narrow belt of forest-steppe, bridging the non-glaciated zones of eastern and western Europe (see contributions by Jiří Svoboda, in Roebroeks et al. 2000). Year-round habitation was certainly possible in some of these locations, but population densities are still likely to have fluctuated markedly between seasons. Recently, archaeologists have begun using more fine-grained analytical techniques – like the microscopic study of growth patterns in animal teeth and antlers, as well as measuring geochemical proxies of seasonal variation such as stable isotope ratios in animal remains – to determine the migration patterns and diets of hunted game (for a useful survey see Prendergast et al. 2018).

39. Lang et al. 2013; L. Dietrich et al. 2019 (grinding slabs, stone bowls, hand pounders, pestles and mortars are all found in impressive numbers at Göbekli Tepe); and see also O. Dietrich et al. 2012.
40. Parker Pearson (2012) provides a detailed survey and interpretation of the archaeology of Stonehenge, including the results of recent fieldwork. The argument for Neolithic aristocracy is based on close analysis and dating of human remains associated with different phases in the construction of Stonehenge, which prove consistent with the idea that the first stone circle was linked to a high-status cemetery, where the cremated remains of a nuclear family were placed around the start of the third millennium BC. Subsequent removals and rebuildings, including the incorporation of massive sarsen stones, were apparently linked to ongoing mortuary rituals, as the same

family's lineage presumably expanded in size and status over a period of centuries.

41. For the rejection of cereal-farming in prehistoric Britain during periods of megalithic construction see Stevens and Fuller 2012; for the seasonality of midwinter meat-feasting at Durrington Walls, as detected from tooth remains, see Wright et al. 2014.
42. Viner et al. 2010; Madgwick et al. 2019.
43. Of course, humans are not alone in this. Non-human primates, like chimpanzees and bonobos, also vary the size and structure of their groups on a seasonal basis according to the changing distribution of edible resources in what primatologists call 'fission-fusion' systems (Dunbar 1988). So too, in fact, do all sorts of other gregarious animals. But what Mauss was talking about and what we're considering here is categorically different from this. Uniquely, for humans such alternations also involve corresponding changes in moral, legal and ritual organization. Not just strategic alliances, but entire systems of roles and institutions are liable to be periodically disassembled and reconstructed, allowing for more or less concentrated ways of living at different times of year.
44. Mauss and Beuchat 1979 [1904–5]. It's worth noting that politics wasn't the aspect of seasonal variations they themselves chose to emphasize, being more concerned with the contrast between secular and ceremonial arrangements and the effects this had on the self-consciousness of the group. E.g. 'Winter is a season when Eskimo society is highly concentrated and in a state of continual excitement and hyperactivity. Because individuals are brought into close contact with one another, their social interactions become more frequent, more continuous and coherent; ideas are exchanged; feelings are mutually revived and reinforced. By its existence and constant activity, the group becomes more aware of itself and assumes a more prominent place in the consciousness of individuals.' (p. 76)
45. It's surely no coincidence that so much of Kwakiutl art plays visually on the relation of 'name,' 'person' and 'role' – relations

laid open to scrutiny by their seasonal practices (Lévi-Strauss 1982).

46. Lowie 1948: 18.
47. 'One does not find in these Plains military societies the germs of law and of the state. One finds that the germs have germinated and grown up. They are comparable, not antecedent, to our modern state and what would appear to be the important problem for study is not the investigation of how one grew out of the other, but what they have in common which might throw light on the nature of law and of the state.' (Provinse 1937: 365)
48. Much of the rest of Lowie's essay focuses on the role of chiefs, arguing that the power of political leaders over the 'anarchic' societies of the Americas was so carefully circumscribed as to exclude the emergence of permanent structures of coercion. Insofar as indigenous states developed there, he concluded, it could only have been through the power of prophecy: the promise of a better world, with religious figures claiming authority directly from the gods. A generation later, Pierre Clastres made almost exactly the same argument in his 1974 essay, *Society Against the State*. He follows Lowie so closely that he can only have been directly inspired. While Lowie is now largely forgotten, Clastres is remembered for arguing that stateless societies do not represent an evolutionary stage, innocent of higher organization, but are based on the self-conscious and principled rejection of coercive authority. Interestingly, the one element not carried over from Lowie to Clastres is that of seasonal variations in modes of authority; and this is despite the fact that Clastres himself focused largely on Amazonian societies, which did in fact have very different structures at different times of year (see Maybury-Lewis ed. 1979). A common and logical objection to Clastres's argument, which remains hugely influential, is to ask how Amazonian societies could have consciously organized themselves against the emergence of forms of authority they'd never actually experienced. It seems to us that bringing seasonal variations back into the debate goes a significant way to resolving this dilemma.

49. Seasonal kings or lords like ‘John Barleycorn’ – a variant of the sacred ruler, destined to end his tenure and be killed each year at harvest time – are stock figures of British folklore to this day, but there is little agreement on how much further back they go beyond their earliest written mentions in the sixteenth century AD. The ubiquity of such ‘temporary kings’ in European, African, Indian, and Greco-Roman myth and legend was the subject of Book III in James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, which he called ‘The Dying God’.
50. Perhaps one reason why the published paper (Lowie 1948) has been forgotten is because of the distinctly uninspiring title: ‘Some aspects of political organisation among the American Aborigines’.
51. Knight 1991.
52. Discussed further by D. Graeber in ‘Notes on the politics of divine kingship: Or, elements for an archaeology of sovereignty’, in Graeber and Sahlins 2017, Chapter Seven.
53. On the ‘carnavalesque’ the classic text is Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World* (1940).
54. This is hardly the place to go into detail about the history of these debates, but it’s interesting to observe that they emerge directly from Mauss’s research on seasonality, which he carried out in co-ordination with his uncle, Émile Durkheim, who is considered the founder of French sociology in the same sense that Mauss is of French anthropology. In 1912, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim relied upon Mauss’s research on indigenous Australian societies to contrast what they described as the ordinary economic existence of Australian bands – concerned mostly with getting food – with the ‘effervescence’ of their seasonal gatherings, called *corroboree*. It was in the excitement of *corroboree*, he argued, that the power to create society appeared to them, as if it were an alien force projected into totemic spirits and their emblems. This was the first formulation of the basic problematic that almost all theorists have been forced to grapple with ever since: that rituals are simultaneously moments where social structure is manifested and moments of ‘anti-structure’ in

which new social forms can pop up. British social anthropology, which took its initial theoretical inspiration primarily from Durkheim, worked through the problem in various ways (notably the work of Edmund Leach, Victor Turner or Mary Douglas). The most sophisticated, and to our minds compelling, proposals for how to resolve the dilemma are currently Maurice Bloch's (2008) notion of the 'transcendental' versus 'transactional' realms; and Seligman et al.'s (2008) argument that ritual creates a 'subjunctive' or 'as if' domain of order, consciously set apart from a reality that is always seen in a contrasting light, as fragmented and chaotic. Ritual creates a world which is marked off as standing apart from ordinary life, but is also where essentially imaginary, ongoing institutions (like clans, empires, etc.) exist and are maintained.

55. As Peter Burke (2009: 283–5) notes, the idea that rituals of rebellion were simply 'safety valves' or ways of allowing common folk to 'let off steam' is first documented only two years after the invention of the steam engine – the favoured metaphor before that had been to let off the pressure in a wine cask. At the same time, though, medieval authorities were keenly aware of the fact that most peasant revolts or urban insurrections would begin precisely during such ritual moments. This ambivalence appears again and again. Rousseau already considered the popular festival to embody the spirit of revolution. Such ideas were later developed in Roger Caillois's seminal essay on 'the festival', written for George Bataille's Collège de Sociologie (transl. 2001 [1939]). It went through two drafts, the first holding forth the festival as a model of revolutionary social liberation, the second holding it forth as a harbinger of fascism.

4. FREE PEOPLE, THE ORIGIN OF CULTURES, AND THE ADVENT OF PRIVATE PROPERTY

1. Or at least broadly similar in form and function: specialists in prehistoric stone tool analysis, of course, spend a great deal of time differentiating specific 'industries' on the basis of fine-grained analysis, but even those who find themselves more

‘splitters’ than ‘lumpers’ would not deny the broad similarities of Upper Palaeolithic traditions – the Aurignacian, Gravettian, Solutrean, Magdalenian, Hamburgian and so on – over very impressive geographical spans. For some recent discussion of the issues see Reynolds and Riede 2019.

2. Schmidt and Zimmerman 2019.
3. Bird et al. 2019; see also Hill et al. 2011.
4. This was one reason for the North Americans’ famous development of sign language. It is interesting that in either case, one is dealing with systems of totemic clans: raising the question of whether such systems are themselves typically forms of long-distance organization (cf. Tooker 1971). If nothing else, the common stereotype that ‘primitive’ peoples saw anyone outside their particular local group only as enemies appears to be entirely groundless.
5. Jordan et al. 2016; also Clarke 1978; Sherratt 2004.
6. We’ll see examples in the next chapter.
7. One can agree, for instance, with the arguments of James C. Scott (2017), that an affinity exists between grain economies and the interests of predatory elites imposing their authority through taxation, raiding and tribute (grain being an eminently visible, quantifiable, appropriable and storable resource). Nowhere, however, does Scott make the naive claim that taking up cereal-farming will in every case produce a state: he simply points out that, for these very pragmatic reasons, a majority of successful states and empires have chosen to promote – and often enforce – the production of a small number of grain crops among their subject populations, while similarly discouraging the pursuit of more chaotic, fluid and thus unmanageable forms of subsistence, such as nomadic pastoralism, garden cultivation or seasonal hunting and gathering. We will return to these issues in later chapters.
8. For basic texts: Woodburn 1982, 1988, 2005.
9. Leacock 1978; for a more extended argument, Gardner 1991.

10. *JR* 33: 49. When Lallemand says the Wendat had never known what it means to forbid something he presumably means by human law: they were, no doubt, familiar with ritual prohibitions of one sort or another.
11. By this we mean that their power was largely theatrical – though of course they also played a critical advisory role.
12. The way we are using the term here somewhat echoes Amartya Sen (2001) and Martha Nussbaum's (2011) 'Capability Approach' to social welfare, which also speaks of 'substantive freedoms' as the ability to take part in economic or political activity, live to old age etc.; but we actually arrived at the term independently.
13. Gough 1971; see also Sharon Hutchinson 1996 for the full implications for women's autonomy, taking matters down to post-colonial times.
14. Evans-Pritchard 1940: 182.
15. It is intriguing to note, in this regard, that all human languages have an imperative form; there are no people, even in radically anti-authoritarian societies like the Hadza, who are entirely unfamiliar with the idea of a command. Yet at the same time, many societies clearly arrange things in such a way that no one can give another person orders systematically.
16. It must be recalled in this context that Turgot was writing in the mid eighteenth century, so most of the criteria we use nowadays to justify the superiority of 'Western civilization' (a concept that did not exist at the time) clearly would not apply: European standards of hygiene and public health, for example, were appalling, much worse than prevailed among 'primitive' peoples of the time; Europe had no democratic institutions to appeal to, its legal systems were barbaric by world standards (e.g. Europeans were still imprisoning heretics and burning witches, something which happened almost nowhere else); standards of living and even de facto wage levels were lower than in India, or China, or under the Ottoman Empire or Safavid Persia until perhaps the 1830s.

17. The proposal that medieval European peasants worked fewer hours overall than contemporary American office workers was first, famously, made by the American sociologist Juliet Schor in *The Overworked American* (1991). It has been contested but appears to have stood the test of time.
18. It was based, in fact, on his own brief contribution to the *Man the Hunter* symposium two years before. The original essay has been reprinted in various editions of Sahlins's collected essays under the overall title *Stone Age Economics* (most recently, Sahlins 2017).
19. The key studies relied on by Sahlins are gathered in Lee and Devore 1968. Earlier ethnographic work, by contrast, was hardly ever supported by statistical data.
20. Braidwood 1957: 22.
21. The concept of a Neolithic Revolution, now more often called the Agricultural Revolution, was introduced by the Australian prehistorian V. Gordon Childe in the 1930s, who identified the origins of farming as the first of three major revolutions in human civilization, the second being the Urban Revolution and the third the Industrial. See Childe 1936.
22. As we've seen in [Chapter One](#), people do in fact still make this kind of claim quite routinely, but they do so in flagrant disregard of the evidence presented by Sahlins, Lee, Devore, Turnbull and many others, almost as if none of this research had ever been published.
23. This reading of Augustine is actually derived from Sahlins's own later work (1996, 2008). At the time, of course, all this could only be informed speculation. Now new discoveries about the evolving relationship between people and crops are forcing us to revisit his thesis, as we'll see in [Chapters Six](#) and [Seven](#).
24. Sahlins 2017 [1968]: 36–7.
25. Codere 1950:19.
26. Oddly enough, Poverty Point is actually situated almost exactly midway between the Bayou Macon Wildlife Management Area and the Black Bear Golf Club.

27. We quote here from Kidder's (2018) summary article. For a more extended, if somewhat idiosyncratic, account of Poverty Point archaeology see Gibson 2000; and for a wide-ranging assessment, Sassaman 2005.
28. As Lowie (1928) demonstrated, in more recent Amerindian societies it was usually ownership of these 'incorporeal' goods (which he compared to our patents and copyrights) that unlocked rights of usufruct over land and resources, rather than direct ownership of territory.
29. Clark 2004.
30. Gibson and Carr 2004: 7, here citing Sahlins's 'original affluent society' on the matter of 'simple, ordinary foragers'.
31. For which see also Sassaman 2005: 341–5; 2010: 56 ff.; Sassaman and Heckenberger 2004.
32. A special issue of the Society for American Archaeology's magazine contains useful discussion of 'Archaic' shell-mound cultures in various parts of North America; see Sassaman (ed.) 2008. For evidence of prehistoric coastal fortifications, trade and warfare in British Columbia see Angelbeck and Grier 2012; Ritchie et al. 2016.
33. Sannai Maruyama, the largest and most impressive Jōmon site, was occupied between 3900 and 2300 BC, and lies in the Aomori Prefecture in northern Japan. Habu and Fawcett (2008) provide a lively account of the site's discovery, reception and contemporary interpretation. For broader discussions of Jōmon material culture, settlement patterns and uses of the environment see Takahashi and Hosoya 2003; Habu 2004; Kobayashi 2004; Matsui and Kanehara 2006; Crema 2013. It's worth noting that the ancient Jōmon have been infiltrating modern consciousness in other ways too: the distinctive 'rope pattern' aesthetics of their highly crafted ceramics provided the graphic template for one of Nintendo's most popular video games, *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*. Jōmon seems quite at home in the digital age.
34. In Europe, the term 'Mesolithic' refers to the history of fisher-hunter-gatherers after the Ice Age, including their first encounters

with farming populations, which we'll discuss in [Chapter Seven](#). Some consider the Finnish 'Giant's Churches' to have had a defensive function (Sipilä and Lahelma 2006), while others note their astronomical alignments and possible role in signifying the division of the year into four seasons, as per the much later medieval Nordic calendar. For the dating and analysis of the so-called Shigir Idol see Zhilin et al. 2018. And for Mesolithic burial traditions in Karelia and Europe's Atlantic seaboard see Jacobs 1995; Schulting 1996.

35. Sassaman (ed.) 2008.
36. English edition of Lahontan (1735), p. 113.
37. Tully 1994. Locke's position was repudiated by Chief Justice Marshall in 1823, in the case *Johnson and Grahame's Lessee v. McIntosh*. But in some countries the related principle of *terra nullius* ('land belonging to no one') was revoked only much more recently, in Australia as recently as the 1992 'Mabo Decision', which ruled that Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders did after all have their own distinct forms of land tenure before British colonization.
38. This is the argument of *Dark Emu* by Bruce Pascoe (2014); whether or not one accepts this technical definition of farming, the strength of the evidence he presents is overwhelming, to show that indigenous populations were routinely working, cultivating and enhancing their territories, and had been for millennia.
39. Of course, the existence of past inequalities and exploitation doesn't in any way weaken claims to title by indigenous groups, unless one wants to argue that only groups living in some imaginary State of Nature are worthy of legal compensation.
40. Marquardt 1987: 98.
41. Frank Cushing, of the Bureau of American Ethnology, was among the first to embark on a systematic study of the remains of Calusa society, which dwindled into obsolescence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Cushing, even with the rudimentary archaeological methods of his time, reached conclusions that have been borne out by later research: 'The

development of the Key Dwellers in this direction, is attested by every Key ruin – little or great – built so long ago, yet enduring the storms that have since played havoc with the mainland; is mutely yet even more eloquently attested by every great group of the shell mounds on these Keys built for the chief's houses and temples; by every lengthy canal built from materials of slow and laborious accumulation from the depths of the sea. Therefore, to my mind, there can be no question that the executive, rather than the social side of government was developed among these ancient Key Dwellers to an almost disproportionate degree; to a degree which led not only to the establishment among them of totemic priests and headmen, as among the Pueblos, but to more than this – to the development of a favoured class, and of chieftains even in civil life little short of regal in power and tenure of office.' (Cushing 1896: 413; and for more recent accounts see Widmer 1988; Santos-Granero 2009).

42. For a summary of the evidence on Calusa subsistence and its socio-economic implications see Widmer 1988: 261–76.
43. Flew 1989.
44. Trouillot 2003.
45. Consider the reaction of Otto von Kotzebue, commander of a Russian ship called the *Rurik*, on first catching sight of the Sacramento River in November 1824: 'The many rivers flowing through this fruitful country will be of greatest use to future settlers. The low ground is exactly adapted to the cultivation of rice; and the higher, from the extraordinary strength of the soil, would yield the finest wheat-harvests. The vine might be cultivated here to great advantage. All along the banks of the river grapes grow wild, in as much profusion as the rankest weeds: the clusters were large; and the grapes, though small, very sweet, and agreeably flavoured. We often ate them in considerable quantities, and sustained no inconvenience from them. The Indians also ate them voraciously.' Cited in Lightfoot and Parrish 2009: 59.
46. Nabokov 1996: 1.
47. In Florida we find stone tools together with mastodon bones at least 14,000 years old (Halligan et al. 2016). Evidence for early

coastal penetration into the Americas along the so-called ‘kelp highway’ is presented by Erlandson et al. 2007.

48. In a now classic discussion, Bailey and Milner (2002) laid out a powerful case for the central role of coastal hunter-gatherers in the evolution of human societies, between the Late Pleistocene and the Mid-Holocene, noting how changing sea levels have grossly distorted our conventional picture of early human demography, submerging a greater part of the evidence. The Tågerup promontory in western Scania, Sweden – and the wider region of southern Scandinavia – offer excellent examples of large scale and longevity in Mesolithic settlement, and for every such ancient coastal landscape that survives we must surely imagine hundreds more, long hidden below the waves (Larsson 1990; Karsten and Knarrström 2013).
49. For a more detailed analysis of the Natchez divine kingship see Graeber and Sahlins 2017: 390–95. We only know that the Great Sun’s power was so limited because when the French and English were competing for allies they found that each Natchez village adopted its own, often contradictory, foreign policy, regardless of what the Great Sun told them to do. If the Spanish had limited their dealings to the court, they might well have missed out entirely on this side of things.
50. Woodburn 2005: 26 (our emphasis). Nor, we should add, is it difficult to find other examples of free societies (for instance, in aboriginal California or Tierra del Fuego), where no adult would ever presume to give another a direct order, but where the one exception is during ritual masquerades when gods, spirits and ancestors who impose laws and punish infractions are presumed to be, somehow, present; see also Loeb 1927; also Sahlins’s essay on the ‘original political society’ which opens Graeber and Sahlins 2017.
51. See Turnbull 1985 for a description.
52. Women have to pretend they don’t know it’s really their own brothers and husbands, and so forth. No one quite knows whether the women really know (it seems they almost certainly do),

whether the men really know the women know, whether the women know the men know they know, and so forth ...

53. This is why, as MacPherson – our principal source here – notes in his *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (1962), negative rights make so much better sense to us than positive rights – that is, despite the fact that the UN Human Rights Charter guarantees everyone jobs and livelihood as basic human rights, no government is ever accused of a human rights abuse for throwing people out of work or removing subsidies on basic foodstuffs, even if it causes widespread hunger; but only for ‘trespass’ on their persons.
54. Consider here the way that indigenous land claims almost invariably involve invoking some notion of the sacred: sacred mountains, sacred precincts, earth mothers, ancestral burial grounds and so forth. This is precisely by way of opposing the prevailing ideology, where what is ultimately sacred is the freedom afforded by being able to make absolute, exclusive property claims.
55. Lowie 1928.
56. Walens 1981: 56–8 provides an elaborate analysis of Kwakiutl feast dishes, which are both corporeal and incorporeal property at the same time since they can die and be reincarnated.
57. Lowie 1928: 557; see also Zedeño 2008.
58. Fausto 2008; see also Costa 2017.
59. Costa and Fausto 2019: 204.
60. Durkheim 1915, Book Two, Chapter One: ‘The Principal Totemic Beliefs: the Totem as Name and Emblem’; see also Lévi-Strauss 1966: 237–44.
61. Strehlow 1947: 99–100.
62. As in so many examples of what we are calling ‘free societies’, maternal nurture sought to inculcate a sense of autonomy and independence; while male nurture – because the trials and ordeals of the Australian initiation ceremonies were, indeed, meant to complete a process of ‘growing up’ – was designed to ensure that,

in those contexts at least, exactly the opposite instincts came to the fore. In this connection it's worth noting that a considerable literature exists, starting from Barry, Child and Bacon (1959), which suggests, as Gardner put it, that 'while non-foragers tend to push children towards obedience and responsibility, foragers tend to press for self-reliance, independence and individual achievement' (1971: 543).

5. MANY SEASONS AGO

1. Indigenous population figures are highly contested, but there is agreement that the Pacific littoral was among the most densely populated regions of aboriginal North America; see Denevan 1992; Lightfoot and Parrish 2009.
2. In Kroeber's magisterial *Handbook of the Indians of California*, he at one point remarks that 'Agriculture had only touched one periphery of the State, the Colorado River bottom, although the seed-using and fairly sedentary habits of virtually all the other tribes would have made possible the taking over of the art with relatively little change of mode of life. Evidently planting is a more fundamental innovation to people used to depending on nature than it seems to those who have once acquired the practice' (1925: 815), though elsewhere he duly acknowledges that a number of California peoples – 'the Yurok, Hupa, and probably Wintun and Maidu' – did in fact plant and grow tobacco (ibid: 826). So planting could not have been such a conceptual innovation after all. As Bettinger noted more recently, 'that agriculture never managed to spread to California was not due to isolation. California was always in more or less direct communication with agriculturalists, whose products occasionally turn up in archaeological sites' (2015: 28). He argues that Californians simply developed a 'superior adaptation' to the local environment; though this does not explain the systematic nature of the rejection.
3. Hayden 1990.
4. We still see this mindset to this day, of course: witness the endless fascination of journalists with the idea that somewhere on

earth there must be some group of humans that could be said to have lived in untouched isolation since the Stone Age. In fact, no such groups exist.

5. This was admittedly not the only way to organize displays: most US museums before Boas organized objects by types: beadwork, canoes, masks, etc.
6. 'Ethnology' is today a minor sub-branch of anthropology, but in the early twentieth century it was regarded as the highest form of synthesis, bringing together the findings of hundreds of micro-studies to compare and analyse the connections and divergences among human societies.
7. This is surely understandable. Exponents of scientific racism took theories like the 'Hamitic hypothesis' to new extremes, notably followers of the Austrian-German 'culture-circle school' (*Kulturkreislehre*), but equally many contemporary writings by French, Russian, British and American scholars. One particular interest of the culture-circle school of ethnology were the origins of monotheism, long considered a unique and seminal contribution of Jewish culture to Europe. The idea of studying an extraordinary variety of 'herding cultures', 'shepherds' and 'cattle keepers' was at least partly to show that there was nothing special about the religious achievements of the ancient Israelites, and that monotheistic beliefs about 'High Gods' were quite likely to crop up in almost any tribal society that spent much of its time moving with animals through arid or steppe landscapes. Published debates on this matter in the mid twentieth century could fill a small library, starting with Wilhelm Schmidt's twelve-volume *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee* (*The Origin of the Idea of God*, 1912–55).
8. Wissler 1927: 885.
9. Hence E. B. Tylor, the founder of British anthropology, wrote that 'though cat's-cradle is now known over all western Europe, I find no record of it at all ancient in our part of the world. It is known in Southeast Asia, and the most plausible explanation seems to be that this is its centre of origin, whence it migrated westward into Europe, and eastward and southward through

Polynesia and into Australia.’ (1879: 26). A JSTOR search for ‘string figures’ in anthropology journals between 1880 and 1940 yields 212 results, and forty-two essays with ‘string figures’ in the title.

10. Collected in Mauss 1968–9, and now also compiled and translated into English, with commentary and historical context, in Schlanger 2006.
11. Since the 1930s and 1940s anthropologists turned first to structural-functionalist paradigms, then later to others that focused more on cultural meanings, but in either case concluded that the historical origins of customs is not a particularly interesting question since it tells you almost nothing about what the meaning of the custom is today.
12. See Dumont 1992: 196.
13. This was, in some ways, closer to the kind of approach advocated in today’s research on how culture spreads, although the ultimate causes now tend to be sought in universal factors of human cognition (e.g. Sperber 2005).
14. Mauss, in Schlanger 2006: 44, and see also pp. 69, 137.
15. For a general overview and history of Northwest Coast peoples, ecology and material culture see Ames and Maschner 1999; for the equivalent in Aboriginal California see Lightfoot and Parrish 2009.
16. E.g. Hayden 2014.
17. Such broad-brush distinctions based on food preferences and resource availability were at the foundation of ‘culture areas’ when these were first defined by Clark Wissler and others in the early twentieth century. In *The American Indian* (1922), Wissler actually first defined ‘food areas’ and then subdivided them into ‘culture areas’. For more recent and critical views of these broad ecological classifications see Moss 1993; Grier 2017. It’s worth noting that the presence or absence of slavery never factors into the ‘culture areas’ described in Wissler’s influential book *The American Indian* (admittedly, chattel slavery was an unusual

institution among the indigenous societies of North America, but it did exist).

18. Actually, he was speaking of a cluster of related peoples, primarily the Yurok, Karuk and Hupa, who shared very similar cultural and social institutions even though they spoke entirely unrelated languages. In the anthropological literature, the Yurok have often come to stand in for Californians in general (just as 'Kwakiutl' have come to stand in for all Northwest Coast peoples), which is unfortunate since, as we'll see, they were in some ways quite unusual.
19. Goldschmidt 1951: 506–8. In fact, all this was unusual even for California: as we'll see, most Californian societies used shell money, but a man or woman's wealth was ritually destroyed at death.
20. Benedict 1934: 156–95. The comparison between Northwest Coast societies and the noble households of medieval Europe was explored by Claude Lévi-Strauss in a piece which is most famous for its definition of 'house societies', and is reprinted as part of his collected essays under the title 'Anthropology and Myth' (Lévi-Strauss 1987: 151; and see also Lévi-Strauss 1982 [1976]).
21. Hajda (2005) provides a fine-grained discussion of the different forms of slavery on the lower Columbia River and further north on the Northwest Coast, and how these developed in the early period of European contact (1792–1830). But she does not go into the wider contrast with indigenous societies south of Cape Mendocino, which rejected slavery altogether.
22. Sahlins 2004: 69.
23. Goldschmidt 1951: 513.
24. Drucker 1951: 131.
25. Elias 1969.
26. See Boas and Hunt 1905; Codere 1950. Ethnographers in the early twentieth century certainly regarded the occasional introduction of such practices into northern Californian societies as highly exotic and anomalous, as in Leslie Spier's (1930)

discussion of the Klamath, who took up slaving and limited aspects of *potlatch* after their adoption of the horse.

27. Powers 1877: 408; Vayda 1967; Goldschmidt and Driver 1940.
28. See, especially, Blackburn 1976: 230–35.
29. Chase-Dunn and Mann 1998: 143–4. Napoleon Chagnon (1970: 17–18) went so far as to argue that ‘it was functionally necessary for the Yurok to “desire” *dentalia* [i.e. money], but only if they were obtained from their neighbours. The social prestige involved with obtaining wealth in this fashion effected a more stable adaptation to the distribution of resources by allowing trade to be the alternative to raid in times of local insufficiency.’
30. See Donald 1997.
31. Ames 2008; cf. Coupland, Steward and Patton 2010.
32. The case for some form of social stratification in this early period was convincingly laid out in numerous pioneering works by the archaeologist Kenneth Ames (e.g. Ames 2001).
33. Arnold 1995; Ames 2008; Angelbeck and Grier 2012.
34. Santos-Granero 2009.
35. Patterson 1982; and thus, Goldman on Kwakiutl slaves: ‘captive aliens, they had no kinship connections with their new homes, and no genuine ties any longer with their original tribes and villages. As persons violently torn loose from their roots, slaves existed in a state equivalent to being dead. Being on the margins of death they were by Kwakiutl standards the proper sacrificial victims for cannibalistic feasts.’ (1975: 54)
36. Patterson 1982; Meillassoux 1996.
37. Santos-Granero 2009: 42–4.
38. See Wolf 1982: 79–82.
39. According to Santos-Granero, who has carefully compiled information about what raiders actually said they were doing.
40. Fausto 1999.
41. Santos-Granero 2009: 156. This does not appear to be a mere analogy: slaves in most Amazonian societies that kept them seem

to have had the same formal status as pets; pets in turn were, as we already observed, seen as the paradigm for property more generally in much of Amazonia (see also Costa 2017). For instance, despite the kind treatment, a man or woman's dogs, horses, parrots and slaves were typically all ritually sacrificed on their death (Santos-Granero, op. cit.: 192–4).

42. See also Graeber 2006. It is interesting in this connection that the Guaicurú, though they captured farmers, did not set those they took as slaves to work planting or tending crops, but integrated them into their own foraging lifestyle.
43. Powers 1877: 69.
44. They'd been among the first on the Pacific littoral to succumb to diseases introduced by traders and settlers. Combined with genocidal attacks, this caused the Chetco and nearby groups to suffer almost total demographic collapse in the nineteenth century. As a result, there are no detailed accounts of these groups to compare with the two major 'culture areas' of California and the Northwest Coast, which lie to either side of their former territories. Indeed, this complex subsector of the coast, between the Eel River and the mouth of the Columbia River, posed significant problems of classification for scholars seeking to delineate the boundaries of those culture areas, and the issue of their affiliation remains contentious today. See Kroeber 1939; Jorgensen 1980; Donald 2003.
45. The historicity of First Nations oral narratives concerning ancient migrations and wars on the Northwest Coast has been the subject of an innovative study which combines archaeology with the statistical modelling of demographic shifts that can be scientifically dated back to periods well over a millennium into the past. Its authors conclude that the 'Indigenous oral record has now been subjected to extremely rigorous testing. Our result – that the [in this case] Tsimshian oral record is correct (properly not disproved) in its accounting of events from over 1,000 years ago – is a major milestone in the evaluation of the validity of Indigenous oral traditions.' (Edinburgh et al. 2017: 12440)

46. We cannot know how common such cautionary tales were because they are not the kind of stories early observers were likely to have recorded (this particular tale survived only because Chase believed the Wogies might have been shipwrecked Japanese!).
47. Spott and Kroeber 1942: 232.
48. Intriguingly, in some parts of California reliance on acorns as a dietary staple can be traced back some four millennia, long before the intensive exploitation of fish. See Tushingham and Bettinger 2013.
49. On the Northwest Coast, bulk harvesting of salmon and other anadromous species extends back to 2000 BC and remained a cornerstone of aboriginal economy until recent times. See Ames and Maschner 1999.
50. Suttles 1968.
51. Turner and Loewen 1998.
52. Take, for example, Joaquin Miller's (1873: 373–4) description in his *Life Amongst the Modocs, Unwritten History*: 'Here we passed groves of magnificent oak. Their trunks are five and six feet in diameter, and the boughs were then covered with acorns and fairly matted with mistletoe. Coming down to the banks of the Pit river, we heard the songs and shouts of Indian girls gathering acorns. They were up in the oaks and half covered with mistletoe. They would beat off the acorns with sticks, or cut off the little branches with tomahawks, and the older squaws gathered them from the ground, and threw them over their shoulders in baskets borne by a strap around the forehead.' (He then goes off on an excursus about how Indian girls have exquisitely small and attractive feet, despite not wearing tight European-style shoes, thus exposing a 'popular delusion' among overweening mothers in frontier communities of the time: feet could be free, and still elegant.)
53. As Bettinger puts it, the acorn is 'so very back-loaded that its capture as stores represents little saved time ... with correspondingly less potential for developing inequality, likewise

for attracting raiders or developing organizational means to defend or retaliate' (2015: 233). His argument basically seems to be that what the remote ancestors of the Maidu, Pomo, Miwok, Wintu and other Californian groups sacrificed in short-term nutritional value they gained over the long term in food security.

54. Much of what we've presented in the preceding paragraphs is based on a more detailed argument by Tushingham and Bettinger (2013), but the basis of their approach – including the suggestion that forager slavery is rooted in the seasonal exploitation of aquatic resources – can be found in publications going all the way back to Herman Nieboer's *Slavery as an Industrial System* (1900).
55. For a general reconstruction of traditional raiding practices on the Northwest Coast, and further discussion, see Donald 1997.
56. Drucker 1951: 279.
57. Golla 1987: 94.
58. Compare Ames 2001; 2008. Slaves could and often did attempt to escape as well, often successfully – especially when a number of slaves from the same community were held in the same place (see e.g. Swadesh 1948: 80).
59. There appears to have been something of a transitional zone on the lower reaches of the Columbia River where chattel slavery dwindled into various forms of peonage, while beyond stretched a largely slave-free zone (Hajda 2005); and for other limited exceptions see Kroeber 1925: 308–20; Powers 1877: 254–75; and Spier 1930).
60. MacLeod 1928; Mitchell 1985; Donald 1997.
61. Kroeber 1925: 49. Macleod (1929: 102) was unconvinced of this point, noting the existence of similar legal mechanisms among Tlingit and other Northwest Coast groups, which did not prevent the 'subjection of foreign groups, tribute taking, and enslavement of captives'. Yet all sources concur that the only real slaves in Northwest California were debt-slaves, and that even these were few in number (cf. Bettinger 2015: 171). If not Kroeber's then

some other mechanism for the suppression of chattel slavery must have been at work.

62. Donald 1997: 124–6.
63. Goldschmidt 1951: 514.
64. Brightman 1999.
65. Boas 1966: 172; cf. Goldman 1975: 102.
66. Kan 2001.
67. Lévi-Strauss 1982.
68. Garth 1976: 338.
69. Buckley 2002: 117; cf. Kroeber 1925: 40, 107.
70. ‘The northwest is perhaps also the only part of California that knew slavery. This institution rested wholly upon an economic basis here. The Chumash may have held slaves; but precise information is lacking. The Colorado River tribes kept women captives from motives of sentiment, but did not exploit their labor.’ (Kroeber 1925: 834)
71. Loeb 1926: 195; Du Bois 1935: 66; Goldschmidt 1951: 340–41; Bettinger 2015: 198. Bettinger notes that (archaeologically visible) inequalities of wealth steadily declined after the introduction of dentalium in central California, and argues that the overall effect of the introduction of money appears to have been to limit debt relations, and thus reduce overall dependency and ‘inequality.’
72. Pilling 1989; Lesure 1998.
73. While captives taken in war were quickly redeemed, it seems that unlike in other parts of California, where tribal divisions assumed collective responsibility for doing so, here it was up to the individual family. Debt peonage seems to have resulted from inability to pay. Bettinger (2015: 171) suggests that this nexus of debt and warfare may partly explain the demographic fragmentation of Northwest Californian groups and break-up of collective groups to begin with, which were never very strong (totemic clans, for instance, were absent), but did exist further south. One early source (Waterman 1903: 201) adds that killers

unable to pay compensation, but not forced into peonage, became a disgrace to their communities and retreated into isolation, often remaining there even after settling their debts. The overall situation did come to look a bit like a class system as men of inherited wealth often initiated wars, directed the peacemaking ceremonies that followed, and then managed the resulting debt arrangements – in the course of which one class of poorer household would fall into marginal status, its members scattering across the landscape and dissolving into patrilineal bands, while another concentrated as dependants around the victors. However, unlike the situation on the Northwest Coast, the degree to which grandees could compel their ‘slaves’ to work was decidedly limited (Spott and Kroeber 1942: 149–53).

74. As further argued in Wengrow and Graeber (2018), with subsequent comments by regional experts in the archaeology and anthropology of West Coast foragers and their descendants, and authors’ response.

6. GARDENS OF ADONIS

1. *Phaedrus* 276B.
2. For the former opinion, see Detienne 1994, and for the latter, Piccaluga 1977.
3. From the children's story *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963).
4. Mellaart 1967.
5. Our understanding of the site largely follows that developed by its recent excavator, Ian Hodder, except that we have emphasized the importance of seasonal variations in social structure to a greater degree. See Hodder 2006; and for further information, images and databases see also www.catalhoyuk.com, with references to multiple field reports, sections of which are also referred to below.
6. Meskell et al. 2008.
7. See, for example, Gimbutas 1982. More recent studies make the point that Gimbutas's publications often inflated the frequency of female forms within Neolithic figurine assemblages, which on closer inspection contain a more balanced proportion of clearly female, clearly male, mixed or simply unsexed forms (e.g. Bailey 2017).
8. Charlene Spretnak (2011) discusses the successive waves of criticism levelled at Gimbutas and provides further references.
9. The key publication on the genomics of steppe migration is Haak et al. 2015. Shortly after these findings were published, the eminent prehistorian Colin Renfrew delivered a lecture at the University of Chicago entitled 'Marija Rediviva [Marija Born Again]: DNA and Indo-European Origins'. He suggested that Gimbutas's '*kurgan* hypothesis' had been 'magnificently vindicated' by the findings of ancient DNA, which suggest links between the dispersal of Indo-European languages and the westward spread of the Yamnaya cultural complex from the steppe north of the Black Sea in the late fourth and early third

millennia BC. It's worth noting that these findings contradict Renfrew's own (1987) hypothesis, that Indo-European languages originated in the region of Anatolia and spread, some millennia earlier, with the dispersal of Neolithic farming cultures. Other archaeologists, however, feel that the genomic data is still too coarse to permit talk of large-scale migrations, let alone establish links between biological inheritance, material culture and the spread of languages (for a detailed critique see Furholt 2018).

10. See here Sanday's *Women at the Center* (2002). Sanday notes that Gimbutas rejects the term 'matriarchy' because she sees it as a mirror image of patriarchy, and therefore that it would imply autocratic rule or political dominance of women, and therefore prefers 'matric'. Sanday notes that Minangkabau themselves use the English term 'matriarchate', employing it in a different sense (ibid.: 230–37).
11. See Hodder 2003; 2004; 2006, plate 22. For the most recently discovered statuette of an (elderly?) female in limestone see also Chris Kark's short but informative item in *Stanford News*, 'Archaeologists from Stanford find an 8,000-year-old "goddess figurine" in central Turkey' (2016), including comments from key researchers.
12. For the occurrence in these regions of likely masked figurines, and the connections between figurines and other Neolithic depictions of masked human forms, see e.g. Belcher 2014: *passim*; Bánffy 2017.
13. Hodder 2006: 210, with further references.
14. Hodder and Cessford 2004.
15. Çatalhöyük actually comprises two main archaeological mounds. Everything we've been talking about so far applies to the early 'East Mound', while the 'West Mound' relates mainly to later periods of prehistory, beyond the scope of our discussion here.
16. Matthews 2005.
17. See Fairbairn et al. 2006.
18. Of the kind we discussed in [Chapter Three](#).

19. Bogaard et al. 2014, with further references.
20. Arbuckle 2013; Arbuckle and Makarewicz 2009.
21. See Scheffler 2003.
22. In terms of environmental history, the upland regions of the Fertile Crescent fall within the Irano-Turanian bioclimatic zone. Current reconstructions suggest that the establishment of deciduous woodlands in this region did not follow directly from the onset of warmer and wetter conditions at the beginning of the Holocene, but was to a significant degree a product of landscape-management strategies carried out initially by forager populations, and subsequently by cultivators and herders (Asouti and Kabukcu 2014).
23. Based on the analysis of carbonized residues of wood found in archaeological sites, Asouti et al. (2015) reconstruct a moister environment for this region in the Early Holocene, with considerably more tree cover than is apparent today, especially along and adjacent to the Jordan Rift Valley. Towards the Mediterranean coast these lowland regions acted as refugia for wood- and grassland species, which survived continuously through the Last Glacial Maximum and into the Early Holocene.
24. Prehistorians have experimented with all kinds of different ways of classifying the Fertile Crescent into ‘culture areas’ or ‘interaction spheres’ corresponding to the main distinctions of the Late and Epi-Palaeolithic era, and the Early (or Pre-Pottery) Neolithic. The history of these various classifications is reviewed and evaluated by Asouti (2006). Here we follow the distinctions outlined by Sherratt (2007), which are based on the correlation of broad ecological and cultural patterns rather than isolated (and fairly arbitrary) categories of archaeological data, such as different ways of manufacturing stone tools and weapons. Sherratt’s classification also has the advantage of avoiding teleological tendencies found in some other studies, which assume all evidence of cultural complexity (such as substantial settlements and architecture) must be in some way related to the development of food production; in other words, he allows for

such developments within foraging societies that had no strong investment in the domestication of plants and animals.

25. For craft specialization in Early Neolithic communities see Wright et al. 2008; and, in general, Asouti and Fuller 2013.
26. Sherratt 1999.
27. Willcox 2005; 2007.
28. For western Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan see Zeder and Hesse 2000; and for eastern Anatolia see Peters et al. 2017.
29. Asouti and Fuller 2013: 314–23, 326–8.
30. Harari 2014: 80.
31. Hillman and Davies 1990.
32. Maeda et al. 2016.
33. The initial growth of permanent villages – between 11,000 and 9500 BC – may have had much to do with a temporary return of glacial weather conditions (known as the ‘Younger Dryas’ episode) after the end of the last Ice Age obliging foragers in the lowland parts of the Fertile Crescent to commit to well-watered locations (Moore and Hillman 1992).
34. This conclusion is based on a combination of genetic and botanical data from samples recovered in archaeological excavations, as explained further below; and for a summary, see Fuller 2010; Fuller and Allaby 2010.
35. See Willcox et al. 2008; Willcox 2012.
36. Fuller 2007; 2010; Asouti and Fuller 2013, with further references.
37. Cf. Scott 2017: 72.
38. In fact, they did not even wish it on their slaves.
39. As proposed by Fuller 2010: 10; see also Fuller et al. 2010.
40. The significance of flood-recession cultivation for the origins of farming was first pointed out in a seminal (1980) article by Andrew Sherratt; republished and updated in Sherratt 1997.
41. Cultivation systems of this kind have been pursued up until recent times in rural India and Pakistan, and also in the American

Southwest. As one geographer observed of Pueblo cultivation in New Mexico: ‘The kinds of places suitable for farming under the system ... have existed from the time of prehistoric settlement; but cultivation, by its disturbance of the surface, leads to washing and channelling, which temporarily or permanently ruin a field. Thus, at the same site the best places to plant are limited in area and changeable in position. The Indians of the present day, like their prehistoric ancestors, hardly disturb the ground, as they do not plough but merely insert the seed in a hole made with planting stick ... Even with the use of their methods fields must be periodically abandoned for later reoccupation. One of the principal causes of such shifts in location lies in the habits of ephemeral streams in the stage of alluviation.’ (Bryan 1929: 452)

42. For which see Sanday 1981, especially her Chapter Two: ‘Scripts for Male Dominance’.
43. Diamond 1987.
44. See Murdock 1937; Murdock and Provost 1973.
45. Owen 1994; 1996.
46. Barber 1991; 1994.
47. Soffer et al. 2000.
48. Lévi-Strauss 1966: 269.
49. See MacCormack and Strathern (eds) 1980.
50. We find ourselves reminded of Silvia Federici’s *Caliban and the Witch* (1998), where she showed how, in Europe, such ‘magical’ approaches to production came to be associated not just with women but with witchcraft. Federici argues that the elimination of such attitudes was essential for the establishment of modern (male-dominated) science, and also for the growth of capitalist wage labour: ‘This is how we must read the attack against witchcraft and against that magical view of the world which, despite the best efforts of the Church, had continued to prevail on a popular level through the Middle Ages ... In this perspective ... every element – herbs, plants, metals, and most of all the human body – hid virtues and powers peculiar to it ... From palmistry to divination, from the use of charms to sympathetic healing, magic

opened a vast number of possibilities ... Eradicating these practices was a necessary condition for the capitalist rationalisation of work, since magic appeared as an illicit form of power and an instrument *to obtain what one wanted without work* ... “Magic kills industry,” lamented Francis Bacon, admitting that nothing repelled him so much as the assumption that one could obtain results with a few idle experiments, rather than with the sweat of one’s brow.’ (Federici 1998: 142)

51. Lévi-Strauss 1966: 15.
52. Wengrow 1998; 2003; and for the evolution of Neolithic counting devices, and its relationship to the invention of script, see also Schmandt-Besserat 1992.
53. Vidale 2013.
54. Schmidt 2006; Köksal-Schmidt and Schmidt 2010; Notroff et al. 2016. A stone figure known to archaeologists as the ‘gift bearer’ also carries a human head to some unknown destination. Images of many of these sculptures and other finds from Göbekli Tepe can be found at <https://www.dainst.blog/the-tepe-telegrams/>
55. Schmidt 1998; Stordeur 2000, fig. 6.1, 2.
56. O. Dietrich et al. 2019.
57. Which is not to say that such evidence for violent conflict is entirely lacking either. The largest preserved sample of human remains from any Early Holocene site in the Middle East comes from the site of Körtektepe, which lies northeast of Göbekli Tepe on a bank of the Upper Tigris, twelve miles from the modern town of Batman, firmly within the upland sector of the Fertile Crescent. Remains of more than 800 individuals have been recovered from the site, of which the 446 individuals so far analysed reveal high rates of skeletal trauma (of 269 skulls, some 34.2 per cent showed signs of cranial injury, including two female skulls with penetrative depressed fractures; post-cranial injuries were found on over 20 per cent of the individuals studied, including three cases of healed parry fractures to the forearm). Given the absence of other signs of warfare, this evidence has been explained – perhaps not altogether persuasively – in terms of

interpersonal violence within a community of settled hunter-fisher-gatherers living in a region of abundant wild resources. A significant number of the human remains recovered from Körtik Tepe were subject to post-mortem modification, including the presence of cut marks on human crania, although none of these can be definitively linked to scalping or the taking of trophy heads (as reported by Erdal 2015).

58. Faunal and botanical remains from Çayönü Tepesi reveal a flexible economy which underwent numerous changes over a period of some 3,000 years. In the earlier phases of the site, which concern us here, its inhabitants made extensive use of wild pulses and nuts, as well as peas, lentil and bitter vetch, with smaller amounts of wild cereals. Cultivation of at least some of these crops is likely, but there is no clear evidence of plant domestication until the later phases of the site. Animal remains suggest its inhabitants pursued mixed herding and hunting strategies which varied over many centuries, including at times a strong reliance on pigs and wild boar, as well as sheep, cattle, gazelle and red deer, and also smaller game such as hares (see Pearson et al. 2013, with further references).
59. For the House of Skulls and the analysis of associated human remains at Çayönü Tepesi see Özbek 1988; 1992; Schirmer 1990; Wood 1992; also Kornienko's (2015) broader review of evidence for ritual violence in the northern part of the Fertile Crescent. Isotopic analysis of human remains indicates that the individuals whose remains came to be stored in the Skull Building had significantly different diets to those buried elsewhere on the site, which might indicate local differences of status (Pearson et al. 2013), or conceivably the incorporation of outsiders into local mortuary rituals.
60. Allsen (2016) provides a sweeping account of the practical and symbolic relationships between hunting and monarchy in Eurasian history, which are remarkably consistent from the Middle East to India, Central Asia and China, and from antiquity down to the time of the British Raj.
61. Gresky et al. 2017.

62. No doubt these contrasts could also be found within the societies themselves; the key difference lies in how these various styles of technical activity were valued, and which were selected as the basis of artistic and ritual systems. For the overall absence of gender hierarchy in Early Neolithic societies of the southern Levant, and evidence for women's participation on equal terms in ritual and economic activities, see also Peterson 2016.
63. Kuijt 1996; Croucher 2012; Slon et al. 2014.
64. Santana 2012.
65. Confronted with objects they can't explain, archaeologists often turn to ethnographic analogies. Among the cases considered here is that of the Iatmul of the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea, a people who practised skull decoration until quite recent times. For the Iatmul, the making of skull portraits was intimately linked to head-hunting. Generally, it began by taking enemy heads in warfare, and was exclusively performed by men. The head of a defeated enemy was honoured by decorating it with clay, pigments, hair and shell. Once transformed, it was then cared for and 'fed' alongside other skulls in a special men's house (Silverman 2001: 117 ff.). This case is important, because it shows how ancestor veneration and the violent taking of heads in conflict may, in some cases, form part of the same ritual system. In 2008 the social anthropologist Alain Testart published an article in the journal *Paléorient* arguing that similar things must have been going on among Neolithic societies in the Middle East, and archaeologists had missed the obvious connection between skull portraits and head-hunting. That prompted an outpouring of responses from archaeologists in the same journal, many indignant, pointing out the lack of evidence for warfare among those same communities, and even proposing that skull-modelling was a ritual strategy for promoting peaceful and egalitarian relations among Neolithic villagers (as first argued by Kuijt 1996). What we are suggesting here is that both parties to the debate were, in a sense, correct; but that they were really talking at cross purposes; or rather about different sides of the same coin. On the one hand, we should acknowledge mounting evidence that

predatory violence (including the display of trophy skulls) was at least ritually and symbolically important among foragers in the northern (upland) part of the Fertile Crescent. Equally, we might consider if skull portraits (or ‘plastered skulls’) represent an inversion of such values in the more southerly (lowland) parts of the region. Not everything has to fit the same model, just because it was happening at the same time, and in this case just the opposite seems likely to be true.

66. Clarke 1973: 11.

7. THE ECOLOGY OF FREEDOM

1. For spectacular developments in stone vessel and bead production in the upper valley of the Tigris see Özkaya and Coşkun 2009.
2. Elinor Ostrom (1990) offers a range of field studies and historical examples, as well as formal economic models for the collective management of shared natural resources; but the basic point was already widely noted in earlier studies, some of which we cite below.
3. Georgescu-Roegen 1976: 215.
4. Periodic repartition of land at the local level was also discussed in O’Curry’s *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish* (1873), and in Baden-Powell’s famous treatise on *The Indian Village Community* (1896). See, more recently, Enajero 2015.
5. Palestinian villages under Ottoman and British rule practised annual redistribution of communal grazing and farming lands under *masha’a* tenure, whereby owners of adjacent plots pooled resources to complete labour-intensive tasks such as ploughing, seeding, weeding and harvesting, responding to annual fluctuations in rainfall (Atran 1986). In Bali, irrigated rice-farming traditionally operated through a system of elected ‘water committees’. Local representatives attend temple meetings, where access to land and water is negotiated annually on a consensual basis (Lansing 1991). Other examples of sustainable land management under some form of communal organization can be

found in the recent histories of Sri Lanka (Pfaffenberger 1998), and also Japan, for instance (Brown 2006).

6. Fuller 2010, with further references.
7. Diamond 1997: 178.
8. Bettinger and Baumhoff 1982; Bettinger 2015: 21–8.
9. For a review of how such processes played out in various parts of the world see Fuller and Lucas 2017. None of this is to deny the fact that crops frequently ‘got around’ various parts of the Old World, and often on a surprising scale, as with the westward transfer of Chinese millets to the Indus, mirrored by the eastward dissemination of western/central Asian bread wheat to China around 2000 BC. But efforts (notably by Jones et al. 2011) to characterize such early crop transfers as precursors to the ‘Columbian exchange’ of the sixteenth century AD (see below) are misplaced, since they ignore a number of important contrasts. These are spelled out by Boivin, Fuller and Crowther (2012), who note that early crop transfers in Eurasia took place within a ‘long-term, slow-growing network of connections and exchanges’ over many millennia, often initially in small and experimental quantities, and driven not by centres of urban expansion but by highly mobile and often small-scale intermediary groups such as the mounted pastoralists of the Eurasian steppe or the maritime nomads of the Indian Ocean. It was precisely this slow millennial history of cultural exchange and gene-flow between Eurasian species that prevented the kind of major ecological ruptures which occurred once those same species were unleashed upon the Americas and Oceania.
10. Crosby 1972; 1986.
11. See Richerson, Boyd and Bettinger 2001.
12. Recent estimates for the population of the Americas before Europeans landed in 1492 are around 60 million. The figure of 50 million lost hectares of arable land is calculated on the basis of a land use per capita model, in the key study by Koch et al. 2019.
13. For eustatic changes in sea levels at the Late Pleistocene to Holocene transition see Day et al. 2012; Pennington et al. 2016;

and for the role of anthropogenic activities in altering terrestrial species' distributions over the same time period Richerson et al. 2001; Boivin et al. 2016.

14. See Bailey and Milner 2002; Bailey and Flemming 2008; Marean 2014.
15. Boivin et al. 2016, with further references.
16. Clarke's (1978) *Mesolithic Europe: The Economic Basis* remains a foundational study of these processes; for a more up-to-date (and global) overview see Mithen 2003; and also Rowley-Conwy 2001; Straus et al. (eds) 1990.
17. Bookchin 1982. In adopting the title of Bookchin's landmark volume on social ecology, we cannot follow his own ideas about human prehistory or the origins of agriculture, which are based on information that is now many decades out of date. We do, however, find much to learn much from his basic insight: that human engagements with the biosphere are always strongly conditioned by the types of social relationships and social systems that people form among themselves. The mutual differentiation of forager ecologies on the American West Coast, discussed in [Chapter Five](#), would be another excellent example of the same principle.
18. As the anthropologist Eric Wolf once put it.
19. Bruce Smith (2001) discusses the whole phenomenon under the rubric of 'low level food production', which he takes to describe economies that occupy 'the vast and diverse middle ground between hunting-fishing-foraging and agriculture'.
20. Wild et al. 2004; Schulting and Fibiger (eds) 2012; Meyer et al. 2015; see also Teschler-Nicola et al. 1996.
21. For a broad account of the spread of Neolithic farming to Europe, understood through behavioural ecology and theories of cultural evolution, see Shennan 2018.
22. Coudart 1998; Jeunesse 1997; Kerig 2003; van der Velde 1990.
23. Shennan et al. 2013; and see also Shennan 2009; Shennan and Edinborough 2006.

24. Haak et al. 2005; 2010; Larson et al. 2007; Lipson et al. 2017.
25. Zvelebil 2006; and for evidence of status differences marked by wealth in Mesolithic cemeteries see O'Shea and Zvelebil (1984) on cemeteries from the region of Karelia; Nilsson Stutz (2010) on southern Scandinavia; and Schulting (1996) on the Breton coast.
26. Kashina and Zhulnikov 2011; Veil et al. 2012.
27. Schulting and Richards 2001.
28. Golitko and Keeley (2007) envisage hostile encounters between Neolithic farmers and more established Mesolithic populations, noting that fortified villages tend to cluster around the fringes of Neolithic colonization.
29. Wengrow 2006, [Chapters Two](#) to [Three](#); Kuper and Kroepelin 2006.
30. Wengrow et al. 2014, with further references.
31. See Spriggs 1997; Sheppard 2011.
32. Denham et al. 2003; Golson et al. (eds) 2017; see also Yen 1995.
33. See Spriggs 1995; the Lapita habit of leapfrogging established populations into empty spaces may be partially confirmed by the findings of ancient DNA, for which: Skoglund et al. 2016.
34. Kirch 1990; Kononenko et al. 2016. Gell (1993) provides a systematic, comparative study of regional traditions of body art and tattooing in more recent Polynesian societies, and their social and conceptual permutations.
35. Holdaway and Wendrich (eds) 2017.
36. As we noted, Lapita is associated with the dispersal of Austronesian languages. Correlations between the spread of farming and language also seem likely for Nilotic cultures (and the much later Bantu expansion from western to southern Africa). For a general consideration of these and other cases of language-farming dispersal see Bellwood 2005; Bellwood and Renfrew (eds) 2002. An association between Indo-European and the spread of Early Neolithic farming in Europe is now considered unlikely (see Haak et al. 2015, with further references).
37. Capriles 2019.

38. Fausto 1999; Costa 2017.
39. Descola 1994; 2005.
40. Roosevelt 2013.
41. Hornborg 2005; Hornborg and Hill (eds) 2011.
42. 'Complex' being the operative word here – the indigenous arts of Amazonia are incredibly rich and diverse, with many regional and ethnic variations. Analysts have, nonetheless, found similar principles at work in visual culture over surprisingly large regions. For a Brazilian perspective see Lagrou 2009.
43. Erickson 2008; Heckenberger and Neves 2009; Heckenberger et al. 2008; Pärssinen et al. 2009.
44. Lombardo et al. 2020.
45. Piperno 2011; Clement et al. 2015; see also Fausto and Neves 2018.
46. Arroyo-Kalin 2010; Schmidt et al. 2014; Woods et al. (eds) 2009.
47. Scott 2009.
48. Smith 2001.
49. Evidence derives from archaeological sites in the valley of Mexico's Rio Balsas; Ranere et al. 2009.
50. Smith 2006.
51. Fuller 2007: 911–15.
52. Redding 1998. Such 'flirtations' probably took the form of selective herd management with husbandry limited to females, allowing the males to roam wild.
53. In the archaeological phase termed Pre-Pottery Neolithic C (PPNC).
54. Colledge et al. 2004; 2005. It's important to note that a decline in crop diversity may have commenced *within* the Fertile Crescent, at roughly the time when the Neolithic farming package was carried north and west towards Europe, via Turkey and the Balkans. By around 7000 BC (the end of the Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period) average crop diversity at sites in the Fertile Crescent had dropped from ten or eleven original founder crops to

a mere five or six. Interestingly, what followed in this region (during the PPNC period) was a downturn in population, associated with the abandonment of large villages and the beginning of a more dispersed pattern of human settlement.

55. See also Bogaard 2005.

8. IMAGINARY CITIES

1. E.g. Dunbar 1996; 2010.
2. Dunbar 1996: 69–71. The cognitive basis of Dunbar’s Number is inferred from comparative studies of non-human primates, which suggest a correlation between neocortex size and group size in various species of monkeys and apes (Dunbar 2002). The significance of those findings for primate studies is not in question here, only whether they can be extended in any simple or direct way to our own species.
3. Bird et al. 2019; see also Hill et al. 2011; Migliano et al. 2017.
4. Sikora et al. 2017.
5. Bloch 2013.
6. Anderson 1991.
7. See Bird et al. 2019; and compare Bloch 2008.
8. Fischer 1977: 454.
9. See especially Childe 1950.
10. We hope to treat the rich African material, outside ancient Egypt, more fully in future work, along with many other valuable cases that could not be included here, such as the Pueblo traditions of the American Southwest, to name but one. For important existing discussions of African material, which bear out a number of our observations about the decentralized and self-organizing nature of early cities, see e.g. S. McIntosh 2009; R. McIntosh 2005.
11. Most archaeologists are generally happy to call any densely inhabited settlement over around 150 hectares, or certainly over 200 hectares, in size a ‘city’ (see, for example, Fletcher 1995).
12. Fleming 2009: *passim*.

13. For direct evidence of in-migration to Teotihuacan, based on isotopic studies of human remains, see White et al. 2008; for similar evidence at Harappa see Valentine et al. 2015. For a general discussion of neighbourhoods and their role in the formation of early cities, Smith 2015.
14. Plunket and Uruñuela 2006.
15. Day et al. 2007; Pennington et al. 2016.
16. See Pournelle 2003.
17. Sherratt 1997; Styring et al. 2017.
18. See Pournelle 2003; Scott 2017.
19. For China see Underhill et al. 2008; for Peru see Shady Solis, Haas and Creamer 2001.
20. Inomata et al. 2020. The key site here is in Tabasco State, and goes by the name Aguada Fénix. Dated between 1000 and 800 BC, it's now recognized as the 'oldest monumental construction ever found in the Maya area and the largest in the entire pre-Hispanic history of the region'. Aguada Fénix is by no means an outlier. Massive architectural features, implying communal labour on the scale of ancient Egyptian pyramids, have now been found at numerous sites in the Maya lowlands, many centuries before the inception of Classic Maya kingship. Mostly these comprise not pyramids but earthen platforms of staggering proportions and horizontal extent, carefully laid out in roughly E-shaped formations; their function remains unclear, as most of these sites were revealed by remote sensing (using LiDAR technology) and are yet to be excavated on any scale.
21. Anthony 2007.
22. Much of this research (published exclusively in Russian) was cutting-edge by the standards of the time, including aerial photography, subsurface prospection and careful excavation. For summaries and descriptions in English see Videiko 1996; Menotti and Korvin-Piotrovskiy 2012.
23. Shumilovskikh, Novenko and Giesecke 2017. What distinguishes these soils, in physical terms, is their high humus content and

capacity for storing moisture.

24. Anthony 2007: 160–74.
25. To get a sense of relative scale, consider that just this vacant centre of a mega-site alone could have contained a large Neolithic town such as Çatalhöyük more than twice over.
26. Scientific dating shows that some of the largest known mega-sites were contemporaneous; Müller et al. 2016: 167–8.
27. Ohlrau et al. 2016; Shumilovskikh, Novenko and Giesecke 2017.
28. Nebbia et al. (2018) present evidence in support of this extreme seasonal model, while leaving room for other possibilities.
29. The people of the mega-sites had a tradition of deliberately burning their houses, which complicates matters for modern analysts, trying to ascertain how much of each site was in use simultaneously. It's not known why this burning was done (for ritual purposes, or hygiene, or both?). Did it take place routinely within settlements, so part of the mega-site was living and growing, with the other part lingering on as a sort of 'house-cemetery'? Ordinarily, careful modelling of high-precision radiocarbon dates would allow archaeologists to resolve such issues. Frustratingly, in this case, an anomaly in the calibration curve for the fourth millennium BC is preventing them from doing so.
30. Kirleis and Dal Corso 2016.
31. Chapman and Gaydarska 2003; Manzura 2005.
32. One should also allow for different answers, varying from one mega-site to another. For example, some of them, such as Maidenetske and Nebelivka, mobilized their populations to dig perimeter ditches, marking out a garden space between the outer circuit of houses and the edge of the settlement. Others, such as Taljanky, did not. It is worth stressing that these ditches cannot possibly have functioned as fortifications or defences of any kind – they were shallow, with frequent gaps so that people could come and go. It's worth stressing this, because earlier scholarship often viewed the mega-sites as 'refuge towns' formed for the defence of a local population, a view that has now been largely

abandoned in the absence of any clear evidence for warfare or other forms of conflict (see Chapman 2010; Chapman, Gaydarska and Hale 2016).

33. Bailey 2010; Lazarovici 2010.
34. As John Chapman and colleagues show, there is nothing in these assembly houses to suggest they housed a political or religious upper class: ‘Those expecting the architectural and artefactual reflections of a hierarchical society with elites ruling over thousands of inhabitants in the Trypillia mega-site will be disappointed.’ (Chapman, Gaydarska and Hale 2016: 120). Aside from their scale, and sometimes an accentuated entranceway, these buildings are similar in their furnishings to ordinary dwellings, except for the interesting absence of installations for the preparation and storage of food. They have ‘none of the depositional characteristics of a ritual or administrative centre’ (ibid.), and do not seem to have been permanently occupied on any scale, which supports the idea that they were used for periodic, perhaps seasonal gatherings.
35. Chapman, Gaydarska and Hale 2016.
36. The Basque system of settlement organization is described by Marcia Ascher in Chapter Five of her book *Mathematics Elsewhere* (2004). We cannot do justice to the subtleties of Ascher’s account here or the mathematical insight she brings, and refer interested readers to her study and to the original ethnographic material she relies on (Ott 1981).
37. Ascher 2004: 130.
38. As one of their leading excavators, the prehistorian Johannes Müller (2016: 304) puts it: ‘The new and unique character of spatial organization in Late Trypillia [or ‘Tripolye’] mega-sites displays some insights into human and group behaviour which might still be relevant for us today. Both the ability of non-literate societies to agglomerate in huge population groups under rural conditions of production, distribution, and consumption and their ability to avoid unnecessary social pyramids and instead practice a more public structure of decision making, reminds us of our own possibilities and abilities.’

39. *Heartland of Cities* was the title of a landmark archaeological survey and analysis of the central Mesopotamian floodplain by Robert McCormick Adams (1981).
40. The marshes of southern Iraq are home to the Ma'dān (sometimes called Marsh Arabs), best known to Europeans through the writings of Wilfred Thesiger. The marshes were systematically drained by Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath government in an act of political retribution, leading to the mass displacement of the indigenous population, and enormous damage to this ancient habitat. Since 2003 there have been sustained and partially successful efforts to reconstitute the marshes and their ancestral communities and ways of life.
41. Oates et al. 2007. Key evidence is in Syria, where military conflict has interrupted archaeological work at sites like Tell Brak, on the Khabur River (a major tributary of the Euphrates). Archaeologists call these grasslands in northern Mesopotamia the 'dry-farming' zone, because agriculture based on rainfall was possible there. The contrast is with southern Mesopotamia, an arid zone, where irrigation from the major rivers was mandatory for cereal-farming.
42. These mounds are the great material accretions of human life and death known by the Arabic word *tell*, built up through successive foundation and collapse of mud-brick architecture over tens or often hundreds of generations.
43. For a survey of 'the Sumerian world' see Crawford (ed.) 2013.
44. This also fitted rather well with British colonial concerns in the modern region they called 'Mesopotamia' which were based on a policy of elevating (and occasionally creating) local monarchies favourable to their own interests (see Cannadine 2001).
45. See Dalley 2000.
46. Wengrow 2010: 131–6; Steinkeller 2015. Scribes sometimes used another word (*bala*) – meaning 'term' or 'cycle' – to refer to corvée labour and also the succession of royal dynasties, but this is a later development. It is interesting to compare the whole phenomenon with the Malagasy *fanompoana* or 'service', a

theoretically unlimited labour duty owed to the monarchy; in this case the monarch's own family was exempt, but there are similar accounts of the absolute equality of everyone who came together to dig earth on royal projects and the cheerful enthusiasm with which they did so (Graeber 2007a: 265–7).

47. Steinkeller 2015: 149–50.
48. Written evidence from various periods of Mesopotamian history shows that rulers quite routinely proclaimed debt amnesties on jubilees and other festive occasions, wiping the slate clean for their subjects and allowing them to resume a productive civic life. Redemption of accrued debts, either by royal proclamation or in 'years of forgiveness', made good fiscal sense. It was a mechanism for restoring balance to the economy of Mesopotamian cities, and by releasing debtors and their kin from servitude it allowed them to continue living productive civic lives (see Graeber 2011; Hudson 2018).
49. Women were citizens and owned land. Some of the earliest stone monuments from anywhere in Mesopotamia record transactions between male and female owners, who appear as legal parties on an equal footing. Women also held high rank in temples, and female royals trained as scribes. If their husbands fell into debt they could become acting heads of households. Women also formed the backbone of Mesopotamia's prolific textile industry, which financed its foreign trade ventures. They worked in temples or other large institutions, often under the supervision of other women, who received land allotments in similar proportions to men. Some women were independent financial operators, issuing credit to other women; see, in general, Zagarell 1986; van de Mieroop 1989; Wright 2007; Asher-Greve 2012. Some of the earliest documentation on these matters comes from Girsu, in the city-state of Lagash, around the middle of the third millennium BC. It comprises some 1,800 cuneiform texts derived mostly from an institution named 'the House of the Woman' and later called 'the House of the Goddess Baba', for which see Karahashi 2016.
50. Chattel slavery, the keeping of slaves as property in private households, was so deeply rooted in the economy and society of

classical Greece that many feel justified in defining Greek cities as ‘slave societies’. We find no obvious equivalent to this in ancient Mesopotamia. Temples and palaces held prisoners of war and debt defaulters as slaves or semi-free workers, who performed manual tasks such as grain-grinding or portage all year round for food rations and owned no land of their own. Even then, they formed only a minority of the workforce in the public sector. Outright chattel slavery also existed, but played no comparably central role in the Mesopotamian economy; see Gelb 1973; Powell (ed.) 1987; Steinkeller and Hudson (eds) 2015: *passim*.

51. Jacobsen 1943; see also Postgate 1992: 80–81.
52. Barjamovic 2004: 50 n.7.
53. Fleming 2004.
54. As John Wills (1970) noted long ago, something of the conduct of assemblies is likely preserved in the speeches ascribed to gods and goddesses in Mesopotamian myth. The deities too convene to sit in assemblies, where they exhibit skills of rhetoric, persuasive speech, logical argumentation and occasional sophistry.
55. Barjamovic 2004: 52.
56. One such ‘urban village’, as Nicholas Postgate (1992: 81–2) terms it, is documented in a tablet recovered from the city of Eshnunna in the Diyala valley, which lists Amorites ‘living in the city’ according to their wards, designated by the names of male family heads and their sons.
57. See e.g. Van de Mieroop 1999, especially p. 123.
58. Ibid. 160–61.
59. Stone and Zimansky 1995: 123.
60. Fleming 2009: 1–2.
61. Fleming (2009: 197–9) notes the ‘tradition [at Urkesh] of a powerful collective balance to leadership by kings may be the inheritance of a long urban history’, and that the council of elders cannot possibly be construed as part of the king’s own circle of advisors. It was rather an ‘entirely independent political force’ of

some antiquity, a collective form of urban leadership, which ‘cannot be regarded as a minor player in a primarily monarchic framework’.

62. To reconstruct early urban political systems in Mesopotamia, Jacobsen relied especially on the story of ‘Gilgamesh and Agga’, a brief epic composition about the war between Uruk and Kish, which describes a city council divided into two chambers.
63. Hence population estimates for the fourth millennium BC city are based almost entirely on topographical surveys and distributions of surface finds (see Nissen 2002).
64. Nissen, Damerow and Englund 1993.
65. Englund 1998: 32–41; Nissen 2002. A significant number of the monumental structures on the Eanna complex are spectacularly enlarged versions of a common household type (the so-called ‘tripartite house’ form) which is ubiquitous in villages of the preceding ‘Ubaid period of the fifth millennium BC. Specialists debate whether some of these buildings might have been private palaces rather than temples, but in fact they don’t resemble later palaces *or* temples very much. In essence, they are up-scaled versions of traditional house forms, where meetings of large numbers of people probably took place in the idiom of an extended family under the patronage of a deity-in-residence (Wengrow 1998; Ur 2014). The first compelling examples of palace architecture in cities of the southern Mesopotamian alluvium come only centuries later, in the Early Dynastic period (Moorey 1964).
66. See Crüsemann et al. (eds) 2019 for a magnificent survey of Uruk’s architectural development over the ages; although we note that their interpretation plays down those aspects of urban planning we would see as clearly relating to civic participation (especially with regard to the early phases of the Eanna sanctuary they tend to assume, even in the absence of written evidence, that any sort of grand architectural project must necessarily have been intended to establish the exclusivity of a ruling elite).
67. Among them are early copies of the so-called ‘Titles and Professions List’, which was widely reproduced in later times and

includes (among other things) terms for various kinds of judges, mayors, priests, chairs of ‘the assembly’, ambassadors, messengers, overseers of flocks, groves, fields and farming equipment, and also of potting and metalworking. Nissen, Damerow and Englund (1993: 110–11) review the immense difficulties of extracting any kind of social history from such documents, which depends on finding corroborations between particular terms and their recurrence in functional administrative texts of the same period, and even then is somewhat tendentious.

68. Though we should also note that, at least by Old Babylonian times (*c.*2000–1500 BC), much scribal instruction also went on in private households.
69. Englund 1988.
70. Bartash 2015. There is a possibility some were already slaves or war captives at this time (Englund 2009), and as we’ll see, this becomes much more commonplace later; indeed, it is possible that what was originally a charitable organization gradually transformed as captives were added to the mix. For the demographic composition of the temple workforce in the Uruk period see also Liverani 1998.
71. Another aspect of quality control in urban temples was the use of cylinder seals. These tiny, near-indestructible carved stones are our main source of knowledge for about 3,000 years of image-making in the Middle East, from the time of the first cities to the Persian Empire (*c.*3500–500 BC). They had many functions, and were not simply ‘art objects’. In fact, cylinder seals were among the earliest devices for mechanically reproducing complex images, done by rolling the seal on to a strip or block of clay to make raised figures and signs appear, so they stand at the beginning of print media. They were impressed on inscribed clay tablets, but also marked clay stoppers of jars containing food and drink. In this way, tiny images of people, animals, monsters, gods and so on were made to guard and authorize the contents, which distinguished the otherwise standard products of temple and later palace workshops and guaranteed their authenticity as they passed among unknown parties (see Wengrow 2008).

72. Some Assyriologists once believed this sphere encompassed almost everything: that the first Mesopotamian cities were ‘temple states’ governed on the basis of ‘theocratic socialism’. This thesis has been convincingly refuted; see Foster 1981. We don’t really know what economic life was like outside the area administered by the temples; we just know that the temples administered a certain portion of the economy, but not all, and that they had nothing like political sovereignty.
73. On the Uruk Vase the figure of the goddess, probably Inanna, is larger than the males who march towards her. The only exception is the figure who approaches her directly, at the head of the parade, which is mostly lost due to a break in the vessel but is most likely the same standard male figure that appears on cylinder seals and other monuments of the time with his characteristic beard, hair gathered into a chignon, and long woven garments. It is impossible to tell what status this male figure refers to, or if it was occupied on a hereditary or rotating basis. The goddess wears a long robe, which almost completely disguises the contours of her body, while the smaller male figures appear nude, and arguably sexualised (Wengrow 1998: 792; Bahrani 2002).
74. See Yoffee 1995; Van de Mieroop 2013: 283–4.
75. See Algaze 1993. There is no hint of these colonies in the administrative correspondence of the mother-city (and writing was hardly used in the colonies themselves).
76. In essence, these were the sacred origins of what we now call commodity branding; see Wengrow 2008.
77. See Frangipane 2012.
78. Helwig 2012.
79. Frangipane 2006; Hassett and Sağlamtimur 2018.
80. Treherne 1995: 129.
81. Among the more remarkable finds from the Early Bronze Age cemetery at Başur Höyük in eastern Anatolia is an early set of sculpted gaming pieces.

82. Largely as predicted, in fact, by Andrew Sherratt (1996); and see also Wengrow 2011. Where urban and upland societies converged, a third element emerged which resembles neither the tribal aristocracies nor the more egalitarian cities. Archaeologists know this other element as the Kura-Araxes or Transcaucasian culture, but it has proved hard to define in terms of settlement types, which vary widely within it. For archaeologists, what identifies the Transcaucasian culture above all is its highly burnished pottery, which achieved a remarkable distribution extending south from the Caucasus as far as the Jordan valley. Over such considerable distances, methods for making pottery and other distinctive craft products stayed remarkably constant, suggesting to some the migration of artisans, and perhaps even whole communities, to settle in remote locations. Such diaspora groups seem to have been widely involved in the circulation and working of metals, especially copper. They carried with them certain other distinctive practices such as the use of portable cooking hobs, sometimes decorated with faces, which supported lidded pots used to prepare a cuisine based on stews and casseroles: a somewhat eccentric practice in regions where roasting and baking food in fixed ovens was an age-old practice going back to Neolithic times (see Wilkinson 2014, with further references).
83. Recent work attributes the eventual decline of the Indus civilization to changes in the flood regime of the major river systems, prompted by alterations in the monsoon cycle. This is most evident in the drying-up of the Ghaggar-Hakra, once a major course of the Indus, and a shift of human settlement to more easily watered areas where the Indus meets the rivers of Punjab, or to parts of the Indo-Gangetic plain which still fell within the catchment of the monsoon belt; Giosan et al. 2012.
84. For a review of the debates see Green (2020), who develops an argument that the Indus civilization was a case of egalitarian cities, but along rather different lines to our own.
85. For general overviews of the Indus civilization, and further description of the major sites, see Kenoyer 1998; Possehl 2002;

Ratnagar 2016.

86. For an overview of the Indus valley's far-flung commercial and cultural contacts in the Bronze Age see Ratnagar 2004; Wright 2010.
87. For the Indus script in general see Possehl 1996; for the Dholavira street-sign, Subramanian 2010; and for the function of Indus seals, Frenez 2018.
88. See Jansen 1993.
89. Wright 2010: 107–10.
90. See Rissman 1988.
91. Kenoyer 1992; H. M.-L. Miller 2000; Vidale 2000.
92. 'The Indus Civilization is something of a faceless sociocultural system. Individuals, even prominent ones, do not readily emerge from the archaeological record, as they do in Mesopotamia and Dynastic Egypt, for example. There are no clear signs of kingship in the form of sculpture or palaces. There is no evidence for a state bureaucracy or the other trappings of "stateness".' (Possehl 2002: 6)
93. Daniel Miller's (1985) perceptive discussion of these points remains important.
94. As discussed by, among others, Lamberg-Karlovsky 1999. It is sometimes objected that viewing the Bronze Age civilization of the Indus valley through the lens of caste means painting an artificially 'timeless' picture of South Asian societies, and thus slipping into 'orientalist' tropes, because the earliest written mention of the caste system and its basic social distinctions or *varnas* occurs only around a millennium later, in the hymns of the *Rig Veda*. In many ways, it's a puzzling – and to some extent self-defeating – objection, because it only makes sense if one assumes that a social system based on caste principles cannot itself evolve, in the same way that, say, class or feudal systems undergo important structural transformations over time. There are, certainly, those who have explicitly taken this position (most famously, Dumont 1972). Obviously, however, that is not the position we are taking here; nor do we see any continuity in this

context between caste, language and racial identity (another false equation, which has hampered these kinds of discussions in the past).

95. On this point see Vidale's important (2010) reassessment of Mohenjo-daro and its archaeological record.
96. The general scarcity of weapons from Harappan sites remains striking; but as Corke (2005) points out, in other Bronze Age civilizations (e.g. Egypt, China, Mesopotamia) weaponry tends to be found in burials rather than settlements; so – he reasons – the visibility of weapons and warfare in the Indus valley may be greatly reduced by an overall lack of funerary remains. As he also points out, though, there is no evidence that weapons were used as symbols of authority (by contrast with Mesopotamia, for instance) or in any way formed 'a significant part of elite identity' in the Indus civilization. What is definitely absent is the *glorification* of weapons and the kind of people who employ them.
97. Obviously, it's partly just the desire to preserve the credit for having 'invented' democracy for something called 'the West'. Part of the explanation might also lie in the fact that academia itself is organized in an extremely hierarchical fashion, and most scholars therefore have little or no experience of making democratic decisions themselves, and find it hard to imagine anyone else doing so as a result.
98. Gombrich 1988: 49–50, 110 ff. See also Muhlenberg and Paine 1996: 35–6.
99. As with all such cases, just about everything on the topic of early Indian 'democracy' is contested. The earliest literary sources, the Vedas, assume a society that's entirely rural, and that monarchy is the only possible form of government – though some Indian scholars detect traces of earlier democratic institutions (Sharma 1968); however, by the time of Buddha in the fifth century BC the Ganges valley was home to a host of city-states, small republics and confederations, many of which (the *gana-sangha*) appear to have been governed by assemblies made up of all male members of the warrior caste. Greek travellers like Megasthenes were

perfectly willing to describe them as democracies, since Greek democracies were basically the same thing, but contemporary scholars debate how democratic they really were. The entire discussion seems to be premised on the assumption that ‘democracy’ was some sort of remarkable historical breakthrough, rather than a habit of self-governance that would have been available in any historical period (see, for example, Sharan 1983; Thapar 1984; our thanks to Matthew Milligan for guiding us to relevant source material, although he bears no responsibility for the use we’ve made of it).

100. On the *seka* principle see Geertz and Geertz 1978; Warren 1993.
101. Lansing 1991.
102. As argued in Wengrow 2015.
103. Possehl 2002: *passim*; Vidale 2010.
104. Independent cities were only entirely abolished in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as part of the creation of the modern nation state. European empires, and the creation of the modern interstate system in the twentieth century, succeeded in wiping out any traces of them in other parts of the world.
105. Bagley 1999.
106. Steinke and Ching 2014.
107. Interestingly, some of the smallest are in Henan itself, the heartland of the later named dynasties. The town of Wangchenggang, associated with the Xia Dynasty – the semi-legendary precursor to the Shang – has a total walled area of around thirty hectares; see Liu and Chen 2012: 222.
108. *Ibid.*: *passim*; Renfrew and Liu 2018.
109. Some scholars initially suggested that the Longshan period was an age of high shamanism, an appeal to the later myth of Pan Gu, who prised heaven and earth apart in such a way that only those with spiritual powers could journey between them. Others at first related it to classical legends of *wan guo*, the period of Ten Thousand States, before power was localized to the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties; see Chang 1999.

110. Jaang et al. 2018.
111. He 2013: 269.
112. Ibid.
113. He 2018.

9. HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

1. The precise location of Aztlán is unknown. Various lines of evidence suggest that populations speaking Nahuatl (the language of the Mexica/Aztec) were dispersed among both urban and rural settings before their southward migration. Most likely they were present, alongside a range of other ethnic and linguistic groups, in the Toltec capital of Tula, which lies north of the Basin of Mexico (Smith 1984).
2. So-called for the founding political union of three city-states: Tenochtitlan, Texcoco and Tlacopan.
3. Mexica kings claimed partial descent from the Toltec rulers of a city called Culhuacan, where they sojourned in the course of their migrations, whence the ethnonym Culhua-Mexica; see Sahlins 2017.
4. Stuart 2000.
5. See Taube 1986; 1992.
6. Published estimates range as high as 200,000 and drop down to as low as 75,000 people (Millon 1976: 212), but the most thorough reconstruction to date (by Smith et al. 2019) rounds off at 100,000 and relates to the Xolalpan-Metepec phases of the city's occupation, between *c.*AD 350 and 600. At that time, much of the population – both rich and poor – lived in fine masonry apartment blocks, as we'll go on to discuss.
7. In fact, it's quite likely some form of writing system was used at Teotihuacan, but all we can see of it are isolated signs, or small groups, repeated on wall paintings and pots where they caption human figures. Perhaps one day they will yield answers to some of the burning questions about the society that built Teotihuacan, but for the moment they remain largely inscrutable. Scholars can't

even tell yet, with any degree of confidence, if the signs name individuals or groups, or perhaps places of origin; for recent and sometimes contradictory discussions see Taube 2000; Headrick 2007; Domenici 2018. It is quite possible, of course, that the residents of Teotihuacan produced more extensive inscriptions on media that have not survived, such as the ephemeral reed or bark paper (*amatl*) later used by Aztec scribes.

8. Other immigrants came to Teotihuacan from as far as Veracruz and Oaxaca, forming their own residential quarters and nurturing their traditional crafts. We should probably imagine at least some of the city's many districts as so many 'Chiapas-towns', 'Yucatán-towns', and so on; see Manzanilla 2015.
9. For the cosmological and political significance of ball-courts in Classic Maya cities see Miller and Houston 1987.
10. See Taube 1986.
11. It is worth noting, in passing, that rather similar arguments were made by the archaeologist and art historian Henri Frankfort (1948; 1951) with regard to the emergence of Egypt and Mesopotamia as parallel, but in some ways opposite, types of civilization; see also Wengrow 2010.
12. Pasztory 1988: 50; and see also Pasztory 1992; 1997.
13. Millon 1976; 1988: 112; see also Cowgill 1997: 155–6; and for more recent arguments, on similar lines, see Froese, Gershenson and Manzanilla 2014.
14. Sharer 2003; Ashmore 2015.
15. See Stuart 2000; Braswell (ed.) 2003; Martin 2001; and for the recent and unprecedented discovery of Maya wall paintings at Teotihuacan see Sugiyama et al. 2019.
16. For Captain Cook as Lono see Sahlins 1985. Hernan Cortés attempted something similar in 1519 after some interpreted him as the second coming of Quetzalcoatl, the once and future king of the Aztecs, though most contemporary historians have concluded he and Moctezuma were really playing a game where none took the attribution particularly seriously. For other examples, and the

general phenomenon of ‘stranger-kings’, see also Sahlins 2008; Graeber and Sahlins 2017.

17. Based on chemical analysis of human remains from an adult male found in the Hunal Tomb at Copan, which suggest an origin for its occupant – identified as the dynastic founder K’inich Yax K’uk Mo’ – in the central Petén region (Buikstra et al. 2004).
18. Cf. Cowgill 2013. Some later conquistadors played a similar role, such as the notorious Nuño Beltrán de Guzmán (*c.*1490–1558), who started his career in the Spanish court as a bodyguard of Charles V before going on to found cities in northwest Mexico, where he ruled as founder-tyrant.
19. Parallels with the fifth century AD seem striking, but again no scholarly consensus exists on how to interpret the evidence connecting these two Tollans of Chichén Itzá and Tula (see Kowalski and Kristan-Graham 2017).
20. Millon 1964.
21. Plunket and Uruñuela 2005; see also Nichols 2016.
22. Froese, Gershenson and Manzanilla 2014.
23. Carballo et al. (2019: 109) note that domestic architecture from this early phase of Teotihuacan’s expansion is very poorly understood. Such traces as have been found suggest irregular and unimposing dwellings, erected on posts rather than stone foundations. See also Smith et al. 2017.
24. See Manzanilla 2017.
25. Arguably, the whole affair has a strong millenarian flavour when set against the backdrop of mass displacements and the loss of former homes to natural disasters; cf. Paulinyi 1981: 334.
26. Pasztory 1997: 73–138; and for more up-to-date accounts of the various construction phases, with associated radiocarbon determinations, see S. Sugiyama and Castro 2007; N. Sugiyama et al. 2013.
27. Sugiyama 2005. And for detailed studies of humans remains and their origins see also White, Price and Longstaffe 2007; White et al. 2002.

28. Cowgill 1997: 155.
29. See Cowgill 2015: 145–6.
30. Sugiyama and Castro 2007. Froese et al. (2014: 3) note that the Pyramids of the Sun and Moon may have been considered as ‘large-scale public goods on a continuum with the constructions of large-scale housing for most of the population’.
31. Carballo et al. 2019; cf. Smith et al. 2017.
32. Pasztory (1992: 287) observed, ‘No other common people in Mesoamerican history lived in such houses’, though as we shall see, the case of social housing at Teotihuacan is not as isolated as once thought.
33. See Manzanilla 1993; 1996.
34. Millon 1976: 215.
35. Manzanilla 1993.
36. Froese et al. 2014: 4–5; cf. Headrick 2007: 105–6, fig. 6.3; Arnould, Manzanilla and Smith (eds) 2012. A significant number of these larger three-temple complexes lie at various points along the Way of the Dead, while others are distributed among the residential zones of the city.
37. Giveaways include dizzying colour contrasts, fractal arrangements of organic forms that merge into one another, and intense geometrical patterning, bordering on kaleidoscopic.
38. Most famously, in the murals from the apartment compounds of Tepantitla district, which also show ball games played in open civic spaces rather than courts (as we discuss further in [Chapter Ten](#)). See Uriarte 2006; and also Froese et al. 2014: 9–10.
39. Isolated elements of glyphic writing may complicate this picture, designating specific groups or individuals, although on what criteria exactly is still unknown; Domenici 2018.
40. Manzanilla 2015.
41. Domenici (2018: 50–51), drawing on the work of Richard Blanton (1998; Blanton et al. 1996), proposes a plausible sequence of developments whereby tensions grew between civic responsibilities and the interests of largely self-governing

neighbourhoods. Some form of privatization is envisaged, undermining the collective ethos or ‘corporate ideology’ of earlier times.

42. As pointed out by the historian Zoltán Paulinyi (1981: 315–16).
43. Mann 2005: 124.
44. For an important but still quite isolated exception see the works by Lane F. Fargher and colleagues cited below.
45. Cortés 1928 [1520]: 51.
46. For which, see Isaac 1983.
47. Crosby 1986; Diamond 1997.
48. In sixteenth-century Mexican city-states (or *altepetl*), these urban wards called *calpolli* enjoyed considerable autonomy. *Calpolli* were ideally organized into symmetrical sets, with reciprocal rights and duties. The city as a whole worked on the basis of each *calpolli* taking its turn to fulfil the obligations of municipal government, rendering its share of tribute, workers for corvée service and personnel to staff the higher ranks of political office, including – in the case of royal cities – the office of *tlatoani* (king, or literally ‘speaker’). Special land allotments often went along with official roles, to support the incumbent administrator, and had to be surrendered at the end of a term. This opened up positions of authority to those who lacked hereditary estates. *Calpolli* also existed outside cities – in rural settlements and small towns – where they may have corresponded more closely to extended kin units; within cities they were often defined administratively by their shared responsibilities for delivering tithes, taxes and corvée, but also sometimes along ethnic or occupational lines, or in terms of shared religious duties, or even origin myths. Rather like the English term ‘neighbourhood’, *calpolli* seems to have become a nebulous concept in the modern scholarly literature, potentially covering an enormous variety of social forms and units; see Lockhart 1985; Fargher et al. 2010; Smith 2012: 135–6 and *passim*.
49. For the literary context of Cervantes de Salazar’s writings on New Spain see González González 2014; and also Fargher,

- Heredia Espinoza and Blanton 2010: 236, with further references.
50. Nuttall 1921: 67.
 51. Ibid. 88–9.
 52. If any of this seems somewhat unlikely, we would ask the reader to consider that the 1585 manuscript of Diego Muñoz Camargo’s remarkable *Historia de Tlaxcala*, which in fact comprises three sections – one textual, in Spanish, and two pictographic, in Spanish and Náhuatl – effectively vanished from sight for around two centuries and was not registered at all in the comprehensive survey of Mesoamerican manuscripts undertaken in 1975. It eventually resurfaced in a collection bequeathed to the University of Glasgow by Dr William Hunter in the eighteenth century, and a facsimile edition was produced only in 1981.
 53. Courtesy of Biblioteca Virtual Universal, Buenos Aires, the reader can find a digital edition of Cervantes de Salazar’s text, *Crónica de la Nueva España*, at:
<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/cronica-de-la-nueva-espana--0/html/>
 54. Xicotencatl the Younger, or Xicotencatl Axayacatl, was initially cast as a traitor in both Spanish colonial and Tlaxcalteca accounts; according to Ross Hassig (2001) his rehabilitation and reputation as an indigenous fighter against the Spanish only took place after Mexico declared independence.
 55. We paraphrase here from the Spanish. We are not aware of any authorized translation of these words into English. Incidentally, Xicotencatl the Elder was quite right about all this: it didn’t take long after the conquest of Tenochtitlan for Tlaxcala to lose its privileges and exemptions with the Spanish Crown, reducing its populace to just another source of tribute.
 56. Hassig (2001: 30–32) provides a summary of the standard account, drawing mainly on Bernal Díaz del Castillo; he also considers possible factors behind the Spanish execution of Xicotencatl the Younger, who died by hanging at the age of thirty-seven.

57. The possibility that Kandiaronk, whom the Jesuits considered to rank among the smartest people that ever lived, might himself have learned about some of Lucian's best lines in his conversations with the French, been impressed, and deployed variations of them in later debate is one that seems utterly inconceivable to such scholars.
58. See Lockhart, Berdan and Anderson 1986; and for Nahuatl traditions of direct speech and political rhetoric, also Lockhart 1985: 474.
59. MacLachlan (1991: xii and n.12) is fairly typical in this regard when commenting on the 'remarkable adjustment' of Tlaxcalteca members of the council to (supposedly) European mores, which he attributes almost entirely to native self-interest under conditions of imperial domination.
60. For a useful discussion of shifting scholarly opinion on such matters, Lockhart (1985) remains valuable.
61. As, for instance, with academic responses to the so-called 'Influence Debate', which we touch on in a later chapter, triggered by the proposal that Haudenosaunee federal structures (the Six Nations of the Iroquois) might have been one model for the US Constitution.
62. Motolinía 1914 [1541]: 227. Even if we can't always establish direct links between the surviving texts of de Salazar, Motolinía and other chroniclers, it seems safe to assume that by the 1540s there would have been any number of bilingual Nahuatl and Spanish speakers in large centres like Tlaxcala, exchanging stories about the deeds and sayings of their notable recent ancestors.
63. Gibson 1952; and see also Fargher, Heredia Espinoza and Blanton 2010: 238–9.
64. On Chichimec see also Sahlins 2017, with further references.
65. Balsera 2008.
66. Fargher et al. 2011.

10. WHY THE STATE HAS NO ORIGIN

1. Lévi-Strauss (1987) referred to Northwest Coast societies as ‘house’ societies, that is, ones where kinship was organized around noble households, which were precisely the holders of titles and heirloom treasures (as well as slaves, and the loyalty of retainers). This arrangement seems typical of heroic societies more generally; the palace at Arslantepe, which we described in [Chapter Eight](#), is most likely just a more elaborate version of the same thing. There is a direct line from here to what Weber called ‘patrimonial’ and ‘prebendal’ forms of governance, where entire kingdoms or even empires are imagined as extensions of a single royal household.
2. This again is easy to observe in activist groups, or any group self-consciously trying to maintain equality between members. In the absence of formal powers, informal cliques that gain disproportionate power almost invariably do so through privileged access to one or another form of information. If self-conscious efforts are made to pre-empt this, and make sure everyone has equal access to important information, then all that’s left is individual charisma.
3. This definition held sway for a long time in Europe. It is why medieval England could begin holding elections to select parliamentary representatives as far back as the thirteenth century; but it never occurred to anyone that this had something to do with ‘democracy’ (a term which, at the time, was held in near-total disrepute). It was only much more recently, in the late nineteenth century, when men like Tom Paine came up with the idea of ‘representative democracy’ that the right to weigh in on spectacular competitions among the political elite came to be seen as the essence of political freedom, rather than its antithesis.
4. Definitions that ignore sovereignty have little currency. One could argue, hypothetically, that the essence of ‘statehood’ is a system of governance with at least three tiers of administrative hierarchy, staffed by professional bureaucrats. But by that definition we would have to define the European Union, UNESCO and the IMF as ‘states’, and this would be silly. They

are not states by any common definition, precisely because they lack sovereignty and make no claim to it.

5. Which is not, of course, to say that they didn't make grandiose claims to territorial sovereignty; just that careful analysis of the ancient written and archaeological sources shows these claims to be generally hollow; see Richardson 2012.
6. On 'Early Bronze Age urbanism and its periphery' in western Eurasia see also Sherratt 1997: 457–70; and more generally, Scott's (2017: 219–56) reflections on 'The golden age of the barbarians'.
7. This pattern much resembles Weber's famous notion of 'the routinization of charisma', where the vision of a 'religious virtuoso', whose charismatic quality was based explicitly on presenting a total break with traditional ideas and practices, is gradually bureaucratized in subsequent generations. Weber argued that this was the key to understanding the internal dynamics of religious change.
8. Nash 1978: 356, citing Soustelle (1962), citing Bernardino de Sahagún's *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*.
9. Dodds Pennock (2017: 152–3) discusses a revealing episode in 1427, when Aztec visitors to a Tepanec banquet were made to dress as women on the orders of the Maxtla (the Tepanec ruler) in order to humiliate both them and their own ruler, who had of late failed to avenge the rape of Aztec women by Tepanec in the market at Coyoacan; things came full circle two years later, when Aztec armies entered Atzcapotzalco and sacrificed Maxtla to the gods.
10. As reported, for example, in the memoirs of Bernal Díaz (in Maudslay's translation), see among others the section on *Complaints of Montezuma's tyranny*: 'but they [the local chiefs] said that Montezuma's tax gatherers carried off their wives and daughters if they were handsome and ravished them, and this they did throughout the land where the Totonac language was spoken.' See also Townsend 2006; Gómez-Cano 2010: 156.

11. Dodds Pennock (2008) situates the public practice of religious violence within broader Aztec notions of gender, vitality and sacrifice; and see also Clendinnen 1991.
12. See Wolf 1999: 133–96; Smith 2012.
13. For general overviews of the Inca Empire and its archaeological remains see Morris and van Hagen 2011; D’Altroy 2015.
14. Murra 1982.
15. *Ayllu*, as we will discuss again later in the chapter, were land-holding groups, bound by ties of descent that cut across households. Their original function was to manage the redistribution of labour within, and sometimes between, villages, so no household was left to fend for itself. The kind of tasks usually taken on by *ayllu* corporations were routinely necessary, but fell beyond the capacity of a typical nuclear household: such things as clearing fields, harvesting crops, managing canals and reservoirs, portage or fixing bridges and other buildings. Importantly, the *ayllu* organization also acted as a support system for families who found themselves unable to obtain the basic material requirements of lifecycle rituals – *chicha* for funerals, houses for newly married couples and so on. See Murra 1956; Godoy 1986; Salomon 2004.
16. Gose 1996; 2016.
17. See Kolata 1992; 1997.
18. Silverblatt 1987; and cf. Gose 2000.
19. Urton and Brezine 2005.
20. Hyland 2016.
21. Hyland 2017.
22. Clendinnen 1987.
23. Maya writings from the early colonial period, such as the books of *Chilam Balam*, almost invariably treat the Spanish not as the actual government but as irritating interlopers, and rival factions of Maya nobility – engaged in ongoing struggles for influence that the supposed conquerors appear to have been entirely

unaware of – as still constituting the real government (Edmonson 1982).

24. Just how much else remains to be discovered is highlighted by new (LiDAR) techniques for mapping tropical landscapes, which recently led experts to triple their estimates for the Classic Maya population; see Canuto et al. 2018.
25. See Martin and Grube 2000; Martin 2020.
26. For a tentative reconstruction of how Maya rulership evolved out of earlier forms of shamanic power see Freidel and Schele 1988.
27. In the absence of definitive evidence, theories of collapse have tended to follow the political concerns of their day. During the Cold War, many Euro-American Mayanists seemed to assume some kind of class conflict or peasant revolution; since the 1990s there has been more of a tendency to focus on ecological crises of one sort or another as the main causal factor.
28. Ringle 2004; see also Lincoln 1994. These reconstructions remain hotly debated (see Braswell (ed.) 2012), but if broadly correct, even in outline, they would correspond to what Graeber and Sahlins (2017) describe as a shift from ‘divine’ to ‘sacred’ forms of kingship, or even ‘adverse sacralisation’.
29. Kowaleski 2003.
30. And for *K’iche* parallels see Frauke Sachse: ‘The Martial Dynasties – the Postclassic in the Maya Highlands’, in Grube et al. (eds) 2001: 356–71.
31. Kubler 1962.
32. Kroeber (1944: 761) began his grand conclusion as follows: ‘I see no evidence of any true law in the phenomena dealt with; nothing cyclical, regularly repetitive, or necessary. There is nothing to show either that every culture must develop patterns within which a florescence of quality is possible, or that, having once so flowered, it must wither without chance of revival.’ Neither did he find any necessary relation between cultural achievement and systems of government.

33. In continental Europe, there's an entire category of scholarship known as 'proto-history' which describes the study of peoples like the Scythians, Thracians or Celts, who briefly break into the light of history through the writings of Greek or Roman colonizers, only to fizzle back out again when the literate gaze turns elsewhere.
34. In their additional cultic role as the 'god's hand' the wives of Amun – such as Amenirdis I and Shepenupet II – were also obliged to assist the male creator-god in acts of cosmic masturbation; so, in ritual terms, she was as subordinate to a male principal as one could possibly imagine, while in reality running a good portion of Upper Egypt's economy and calling political shots at court. Judging by the grand locations of their funerary chapels at Karnak and Medinet Habu, the combination made for some very effective *realpolitik*.
35. See John Taylor's chapter on 'The Third Intermediate Period' in Shaw (ed.) 2000: 330–69, especially 360–62; also Ayad 2009.
36. Schneider 2008: 184.
37. In *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Shaw ed. 2000), for instance, the relevant chapter is called 'Middle Kingdom Renaissance (c.2055–1650 BC).'
38. For a useful summary see Pool 2007.
39. Rosenwig 2017. Again, this picture is liable to change quite dramatically with the application of LiDAR survey techniques in the provinces of Tabasco and Veracruz, which is already under way at the time of writing.
40. See Rosenwig 2010.
41. Attention to individual differences and personal aesthetics is also evident in a second major category of Olmec sculpture, most abundantly documented at San Lorenzo. It depicts human figures with unusual or anomalous features, including images of hunchbacks, dwarfs, lepers and possibly also images based on people's observations of miscarried embryos; see Tate 2012.
42. See Drucker 1981; Clark 1997; Hill and Clark 2001.

43. See Miller and Houston 1987.
44. Hill and Clark 2001. It's of more than passing interest, in this context, that Teotihuacan – governed on more collective principles than Olmec, Maya or Aztec cities – had no such arena for the official staging of ball games. Excluding a public ball-court from the municipal plan must surely have been a deliberate choice, since many of Teotihuacan's occupants would have been familiar with such spectacles, and as we saw in [Chapter Nine](#), nearly everything else in the city centre was laid out with exacting foresight and precision. When ball games do appear at Teotihuacan, it's in a different context. So very different, that one begins to suspect some conscious inversion of ideas that were canonical in the surrounding kingdoms of Oaxaca and the Maya lowlands (recalling that people moved regularly between these regions and were familiar with the practices of their neighbours). The evidence comes from domestic wall paintings in one of Teotihuacan's well-appointed housing estates, known as Tepantitla. Gods are depicted, but also the earliest known images of people playing ball games with their feet, hands and sticks – something on the lines of soccer, basketball and hockey (see Uriarte 2006). All this was in violation of aristocratic norms. The scenes have a street setting, with large numbers of participants all shown at the same scale. Associated with these scenes is a recurrent symbolism of water lilies, a powerful hallucinogen. Perhaps what we are seeing here is something peculiar to Teotihuacan; or perhaps we are glimpsing something of the games played by ordinary folk throughout Mesoamerica, a side of life that is largely invisible to us in more stratified polities.
45. Clendinnen 1991: 144.
46. In this respect, Wilk's (2004) stimulating comparison between the dynamics of the Olmec horizon and the cultural/political impact of modern beauty pageants, such as Miss World and Miss Universe, seems very apposite. Geertz coined the phrase 'theatre state' (1980) to describe Balinese kingdoms, where, he suggested, the entire apparatus of tribute basically existed for the purpose of organizing spectacular rituals, rather than the other way round.

His argument has some notable weaknesses – especially as seen from the perspective of Balinese women – but the analogy may still be helpful, especially when one considers the original role of those famous Balinese cock fights (familiar to any first-year anthropology student); they were initially promoted and staged by royal courts as a way of putting people into debt, which not infrequently led to one’s wife and children being handed over to the palace for use as slaves or concubines, or for onward sale abroad (Graeber 2011: 157–8, 413 n.88).

47. As we saw in [Chapter Eight](#).
48. See Conklin and Quilter (eds) 2008.
49. See Isbell 2008.
50. See Quilter 2002; Castillo Butters 2005.
51. Cf. Weismantel 2013.
52. These are precisely the sort of highly complex images studied by the anthropologist Carlo Severi (2015) in his classic analysis of the ‘chimera principle’.
53. Burger 2011; Torres 2008. The stone carvings at Chavín de Huántar seem mostly concerned with making permanent what were inherently ephemeral experiences of altered states of consciousness. Animal motifs typical of Chavín art – such as felines, snakes and crested eagles – actually occur up to 1,000 years earlier on cotton textiles and in beadwork, which already circulated widely between the highlands and the coast. Interestingly, more fully preserved textiles from later periods show that, even at the height of Chavín’s power, coastal societies were approaching their deities in explicitly female forms (Burger 1993). At Chavín de Huántar itself, women appear to be absent from the surviving repertory of figural sculpture.
54. Rick 2017.
55. See Burger 2008.
56. See Weismantel 2013.
57. For a more detailed discussion of the divine kingship of the Natchez, with full references, see Graeber’s chapter ‘Notes on the

- Politics of Divine Kingship’, in Graeber and Sahlins 2017: 390–98.
58. Cited in Graeber, *ibid.* p. 394.
 59. Lorenz 1997.
 60. See Gerth and Wright Mills (eds) 1946: pp. 233–4.
 61. Brown 1990: 3, quoting John Swanton’s *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley and Adjacent Coast of the Gulf of Mexico* (1911) (Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 43).
 62. For a good summary of such royal ‘exploits’ see de Heusch 1982; the king most famous for gunning down his own subjects was the Ganda King Mutesa, who was trying to impress David Livingstone after the latter presented him with the gift of a rifle, but it’s by no means a unique event: see Simonse 1992; 2005.
 63. Graeber and Sahlins 2017: 129.
 64. Crazzolara 1951: 139.
 65. Reported in Diedrich Westermann’s *Shilluk People: their Language and Folklore* (1911). Philadelphia: Board of Foreign Missions of the United Presbyterian Church of North America, p. 175.
 66. Graeber and Sahlins 2017: 96, 100–101, 130.
 67. We will be considering such possibilities further in the next chapter.
 68. Actually, we are being disingenuous here. This is not just a thought experiment: the remains of the Great Village – now known to archaeologists as the Fatherland Site, in Adams County – were in fact excavated, notably by Stu Neitzel in a few intermitted seasons of fieldwork, during the 1960s and early 1970s. In the centuries since its abandonment, what was left of the site had been covered by up to ten feet of colluvial mud deposited by the St Catherine Creek, which first had to be removed with heavy machinery (bulldozers), playing havoc with the archaeological remains below and obliterating key evidence. What Neitzel (1965; 1972) reported accords in broad outline with what we have just described; no doubt, more careful and modern

techniques could do a lot better in terms of archaeological reconstruction (cf. Brown 1990).

69. In fact, early excavations in the vicinity of Mound C, the likely location of the Natchez temple, did turn up more than twenty burials with grave goods including objects of French as well as local manufacture; but their excavation was poorly conducted, with no systematic documentation, and they likely date to the very final period of temple use, just before the building was razed, and when the power of the Great Sun was no doubt already much diminished (see Brown 1990: 3; Neitzel 1965, reporting finds made by Moreau B. C. Chambers in 1930).
70. Egyptologists refer to the First and Second Dynasties as Egypt's 'Early Dynastic' period while the 'Old Kingdom' – somewhat confusingly – begins only in the Third Dynasty.
71. See Dickson 2006; Morris 2007; Campbell (ed.) 2014; Graeber and Sahlins 2017: 443–4, with further references.
72. For the latter possibility, and a review of earlier interpretations, see Moorey (1977); but for an alternative view, which sees them as true royal burials, see Marchesi 2004.
73. Campbell 2014.
74. Cf. Campbell 2009.
75. Although perhaps not the only tombs, since Egypt's earliest rulers may occasionally have split their ancestors' bodies up, burying them in more than one location to distribute their mortuary cult as widely as possible; see Wengrow 1996: 226–8.
76. Wengrow 1996: 245–58; Bestock 2008; see also Morris 2007; 2014.
77. Macy Roth 2002.
78. Maurice Bloch (2008) has observed, in a similar vein, that early states almost invariably involve an explosion of spectacular and often apparently random violence, and that the final result of such states is to 'disorganize' the ritual life of ordinary households in a way that, somehow, can never be put back to how it was even if

those states collapse. It's from this dilemma, he argues, that the phenomenon of universalizing religion emerges.

79. One effect of this was to create a series of 'no-man's-lands' around Egypt's territorial borders. For example, the political separation of Egypt from once closely related lands and peoples in Sudan seems to have involved the depopulation of territories on Egypt's newly established southern boundary, and the dismantling of a former apparatus of chiefly power within Nubia: the so-called A-Group, as archaeologists call it. This took place in an act of violent domination, commemorated in a rock carving at Gebel Sheikh Suleiman on the Second Cataract. So, in effect, we have a kind of symmetry between extremes of ritual killing at the centre of the new Egyptian polity (on the occasion of a ruler's demise) and the foundational violence taking place, or commemorated, on its territorial frontiers; Baines 2003; Wengrow 2006: *passim*.
80. For which see Lehner 2015.
81. Wengrow et al. 2014.
82. Jones et al. 2014. Neolithic burials were usually located in the arid margins of the Nile valley (areas dry enough to afford a certain amount of natural preservation for the corpse), and sometimes further into adjacent desert lands; they seem not to have had any sort of durable superstructures, but were often laid out in large cemeteries, and other lines of evidence show that people remembered, revisited and reused the same locations over a period of generations; see Wengrow 2006: 41–71; Wengrow et al. 2014.
83. Indeed, Egyptologists had long noted certain elements of later kingship showing up in art far 'too early' – for instance, the famous Red Crown of Lower Egypt appears on a piece of pottery dated almost 1,000 years before the Red and White Crowns were combined to become an official symbol of Egyptian unity; the standard motif of a king wielding a mace to smite his foes crops up in a painted tomb at Hierakonpolis, 500 years before the Narmer Palette, and so on. See Baines 1995 for further examples and references.

84. Recent Nilotic peoples have tended to be strictly patrilineal; this, actually, does not entirely exclude women from taking on prominent positions, but generally they do so by playing the part of men. Among the Nuer, for instance, a ‘bull’ or village leader with no male heir can simply declare his daughter a man, and she might well take over his position, even marry a woman and be recognized as father of her children. It’s probably no coincidence that in Egyptian history as well, women who took on dominant positions often did so by declaring themselves, effectively, males (a notable exception to this being the god’s wives of Amun, whom we discussed earlier in this chapter).
85. See Wengrow 2006: [Chapters One](#), [Four](#) and [Five](#); Kemp 2006; Teeter (ed.) 2011. Population estimates for these ‘proto-kingdoms’ remain highly speculative due to the inaccessibility of ancient living quarters and the burial of large areas of prehistoric settlement beneath modern field systems and floodplains.
86. See Friedman 2008; 2011.
87. See Wengrow 2006: 92–8.
88. Ibid.: 142–6.
89. Integration of large-scale *chicha* consumption into lifecycle rituals was not actually an Inca innovation – it traces back to the expansion of Tiwanaku, midway between Chavín (with its very different ritual comestibles) and the Inca; see Goldstein 2003.
90. See Murra 1956: 20–37.
91. Wengrow 2006: 95, 160–63, 239–45, with further references.
92. Lehner 2015.
93. See also Roth 1991.
94. Symbolic and likely also practical associations between monumental architecture and the activities of ships’ crews are also suggested for the later Bronze Age stone temples of Byblos (Jbeil) in Lebanon, a port town with close trading and cultural links to Egypt (see Wengrow 2010b: 156); and ethnographic descriptions of how team-skills transfer from boat-handling to the manipulation of heavy stone-work can be found, for instance, in

John Layard's classic ethnography of a Melanesian island, *Stone Men of Malekula* (1942). London: Chatto and Windus.

95. The production line analogy is inspired by Lewis Mumford on the 'megamachine', where he famously argued that the first complex machines were in fact made of people. The 'rationalization' of labour typical of the factory system was, as scholars like Eric Williams long ago suggested, really pioneered on slave plantations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but others have recently pointed out that ships around that time, both merchant and military, seem to have been another major zone of experimentation, since being on board such vessels was one of the few circumstances where large numbers of people were assigned tasks entirely under a single overseer's command.
96. As pointed out by feminist theorists (e.g. Noddings 1984).
97. It is worth recalling here that in the tombs of some of Egypt's highest-ranking officials, during the Old Kingdom, we find among their most important titles not just military, bureaucratic and religious offices but also duties such as 'Beloved Acquaintance of the King', 'Overseer of the Palace Manicurists', and so on (Strudwick 1985)
98. Compare Baines 1997; 2003; Kolata 1997.
99. For the different forms of Egyptian and Mesopotamian kingship see Frankfort 1948; Wengrow 2010a; for rare exceptions to this pattern, in which Mesopotamian kings appear to have claimed divine or near-divine status, see the contributions by Piotr Michalowski and Irene Winter in Brisch (ed.) 2008, both stressing the exceptional and ambivalent nature of such claims.
100. This situation persisted even in later Mesopotamian history: when Hammurabi erected a stela with his famous law code in the eighteenth century BC, this might have seemed the quintessential sovereign act, decreeing how violence could and could not be used within the king's territories, creating a new order out of nothing; but in fact most of these grand edicts appear never to have been systematically enforced. Babylonian subjects continued to use the same complex patchwork of traditional legal codes and practices they had before. Moreover, as the decorative scheme of

the stela makes clear, Hammurabi is acting on the authority of the sun-god Shamash; see Yoffee 2005: 104–12.

101. And here we can draw a further contrast with Mesopotamia, where administration was an established feature of earthly government, but the cosmos – far from being predictably organized – was inhabited by gods whose actions (like those of the biblical Yahweh) often came in the form of unexpected interventions, and frequently chaotic ruptures in human affairs; Jacobsen 1976.
102. Other examples of regimes where sovereignty and competitive politics dominated the earthly sphere, and administrative hierarchies were projected on to the universe, might include many South Asian societies, which exhibit a similar fascination with cosmic cycles, and medieval Europe, where the Church and its image of angelic hierarchies seems to have preserved a memory of the old legal-bureaucratic order of ancient Rome.
103. Martin and Grube 2000: 20; Martin 2020.
104. See Bagley 1999.
105. Shaughnessy 1989.
106. Appeal to divination is limited in Egypt before the New Kingdom, and had an ambivalent role in Inca systems of government. As Gose (1996: 2) explains, in the Inca case oracular performances were actually at odds with the personal authority of living kings. They centred instead on the mummified bodies of royal ancestors or their statue equivalents, which provided one of the few venues for expressing subaltern (and potentially subversive) views, in a manner that did not challenge the assumption of the ruler's absolute sovereignty and supreme authority. In a similar way, in Renaissance times, to take a king or queen's horoscope was often considered to be an act of treason. Maya kings used bloodletting and stone-tossing as forms of divination, but they do not seem to have been of central importance to affairs of state.
107. Yuan and Flad 2005. Outside the sphere of literacy, divination with animal parts was also widely practised.

108. See Keightley 1999.
109. Shaughnessy 1999.
110. Shang China might well be considered the paradigm for what the anthropologist Stanley Tambiah (1973) has described as ‘galactic polities’, also the most common form in later Southeast Asian history, where sovereignty concentrated at the centre and then attenuated outwards, focusing in some places, fading in others to the point where, at the edges, certain rulers or nobles might actually claim to be part of empires – even distant descendants of the founders of empires – whose current ruler had never heard of them. We can contrast this sort of outward proliferation of sovereignty with another kind of macro-political pattern, emerging first in the Middle East and then gradually across much of Eurasia, where diametrically opposed notions of what actually constitutes ‘government’ would face off against each other in dynamic tension, creating the great frontier zones that separated bureaucratic regimes (whether in China, India or Rome) from the heroic politics of nomadic peoples which threatened constantly to overwhelm them; for which see Lattimore 1962; Scott 2017.
111. The clearest illustration of this royal theme from the Old Kingdom is to be found in the reliefs surviving from Sahure’s mortuary temple at Abusir; see Baines 1997.
112. Baines 1999.
113. See Seidlmayer 1990; Moreno García 2014.
114. Translation as per Seidlmayer 1990: 118–21. Especially striking, in this regard, are the nomarch’s claims to keep his people not just healthy, but also provided with the basic necessities for a full social life: the resources to sustain a family, conduct proper funerals, and the guarantee that one would not be cut loose from one’s local moorings or condemned to live as a refugee.
115. Dunbar 1996: 102; Diamond 2012: 11. This assumption is enshrined both in the kind of ‘scalar stress’ theories we discussed at the start of [Chapter Eight](#), and also in a certain strand of evolutionary psychology (see also Dunbar 2010), which argues that bureaucracy supplies the administrative solution to problems

of information storage and management, arising when societies scale up beyond a certain threshold of face-to-face interaction. Bureaucracy, according to such theories, acts as a kind of ‘external symbolic storage’ when the innate capacities of the human mind for storing and recalling information (e.g. relating to the flow of commodities or labour) are overtaxed. So far as we are aware, there is absolutely no empirical evidence to support this hypothetical but deeply ingrained reconstruction of the ‘origins of bureaucracy’.

116. Interestingly, the archival records of the nineteenth-century Merina kingdom of Madagascar are much the same: the kingdom was conceived in patrimonial terms as a royal household, and each descent group’s true nature was defined by the service they performed for the king, who was often imagined as a child, with the people as his or her nursemaids. The records go into endless and exact detail concerning every item that passed in and out of the royal household to maintain the ruler, but are otherwise almost silent on economic affairs (see Graeber, ‘The People as Nursemaids of the King,’ in Graeber and Sahlins 2017).
117. Akkermans (ed.) 1996.
118. See Schmandt-Besserat 1992.
119. Oddly, very few such seals have been found at Tell Sabi Abyad itself, perhaps because they were made of materials that have not survived such as wood; miniature stamp seals made of stone, and of the kind we are referring to here, are quite ubiquitous on other northern Mesopotamian sites of the same (‘Late Neolithic’ or ‘Halaf’) period.
120. Akkermans and Verhoeven 1995; Wengrow 1996.
121. The suggestion – sometimes voiced – that all this was a result of part of the population being absent from the village during the herding season, when they took their flocks to graze on nearby hillsides (a practice called transhumance), is probably much too simplistic. It also doesn’t make a great deal of sense – there were still the elderly, spouses, siblings and offspring left in the village to look after property or report problems.

122. See Wengrow 2010a: Chapter Four.
123. Wengrow 1998: 790–92; 2001.
124. This is of course somewhat ironic, since archaeologists working within older frameworks of social evolution had long assumed that ‘Ubaid societies must have been organized into some sort of ‘complex chiefdoms’, simply because they are chronologically located between the earliest farming settlements and the earliest cities (which, in turn, are assumed to usher in the ‘the birth of the state’). The logical circularity of such arguments will by now be very obvious, as will their lack of fit to the archaeological evidence for the periods in question.
125. Murra 1956: 156.
126. See, especially, Salomon 2004. It may be observed in passing that market systems in medieval villages in England appear to have worked in much the same way, though less formally: the vast majority of transactions were on credit, and every six months to a year a collective accounting was held in an effort to cancel all debts and credits back to zero (Graeber 2011: 327).
127. Salomon 2004: 269; Hyland 2016. It is possible that string-based counting techniques may also have been used in prehistoric Mesopotamia, in conjunction with clay symbols and stamp seals, as demonstrated by evidence for the suspension of perforated lumps of clay, shaped into regular forms and sometimes bearing impressed signs or symbols (Wengrow 1998: 787).
128. See Wernke 2006: 180–81, with further references.
129. For the mode of organization and labour tribute schedules see Hyland 2016.
130. John Victor Murra in his magisterial thesis on *The Economic Organization of the Inca State* (1956), cites Spanish sources who tell of local misanthropes and misfits elevated to new positions of authority; of neighbours turning against each other; and debtors uprooted from their villages – though one can never be sure how much of this was a result of the *conquista* itself; see also Rowe 1982.

131. For which see *Debt: The First 5000 Years*, by one of the authors of the present volume (Graeber 2011); and also Hudson 2018.
132. Von Dassow 2011: 208.
133. Murra (1956: 228) concludes that the illusion of the Inca state as socialistic derives from ‘ascribing to the state what was actually an *ayllu* function’. ‘Security for the incapacitated was provided by an age-old, pre-Incaic system of automatic access to community assets and surpluses as well as reciprocal labour services,’ he goes on: ‘There may have been some state relief in the case of major frost and drought; the references to this are late and very few compared to the hundreds that describe the use of reserves for military, court, church and administrative purposes.’ Probably, this is overstated, since the Inca also inherited administrative structures and an apparatus of social welfare from some of the kingdoms they conquered, so the reality must surely have varied from place to place (S. Rockefeller, personal communication).
134. See, for example, Richardson (2012) on Mesopotamia, and Schrakamp (2010) on the seasonal dimensions of early dynastic military organization; Tuerenhout (2002) on seasonal warfare among the Classic Maya; and for further examples and discussion see contributions to Neumann et al. (eds) (2014); Meller and Schefik (2015).
135. James Scott (2017: 15) makes a similar observation at the beginning of his book *Against the Grain*: ‘In a good part of the world, the state, even when it was robust, was a seasonal institution. Until very recently, during the annual monsoons in Southeast Asia, the state’s ability to project its power shrank back virtually to its palace walls. Despite the state’s self-image and its centrality in most standard histories, it is important to recognize that for thousands of years after its first appearance, it was not a constant but a variable, and a very wobbly one at that in the life of much of humanity.’
136. Buoyed, perhaps, by the illusion common to so many who claim arbitrary power, that the fact that you are able to kill your subjects is somehow equivalent to having given them life.

137. In a brilliant and under-appreciated book called *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990), James Scott makes the point that whenever one group has overwhelming power over another, as when a community is divided between lords and serfs, masters and slaves, high-caste and untouchable, both sides tend to end up acting as if they were conspiring to falsify the historical record. That is: there will always be an ‘official version’ of reality – say, that plantation owners are benevolent paternal figures who only have the best interest of their slaves at heart – which no one, neither masters or slaves, actually believes, and which they are likely to treat as self-evidently ridiculous when ‘offstage’ and speaking only to each other, but which the dominant group insists subordinates play along with, particularly at anything that might be considered a public event. In a way, this is the purest expression of power: the ability to force the dominated to pretend, effectively, that two plus two is five. Or that the pharaoh is a god. As a result, the version of reality that tends to be preserved for history and posterity is precisely that ‘official transcript’.
138. Abrams 1977.
139. See also Wengrow 2010a.
140. As pointed out, for example, by Mary Harris (1997); recall here also that the centralized knowledge systems of Chavín, the Classic Maya and other pre-Columbian polities may well have rested on a continent-wide system of mathematics, originally calculated with the aid of strings and cords, and hence grounded ultimately in fabric technologies (Clark 2004); and that the invention of cuneiform mathematics in cities was preceded by some thousands of years of sophisticated weaving technologies in villages, echoes of which are preserved in the forms and decoration of prehistoric ceramic traditions throughout Mesopotamia (Wengrow 2001).
141. Renfrew 1972.
142. A chronological scheme, widely used by archaeologists for the entire island, starts with the ‘Pre-palatial’, moving on to ‘Proto-palatial’, ‘Neo-palatial’ and so on.
143. Whitelaw 2004.

144. See Davis 1995.
145. Preziosi and Hitchcock 1999.
146. We should perhaps mention here Arthur Evans's notorious identification of a 'priest-king' among the painted figures he uncovered at Knossos at the turn of the twentieth century (for which see S. Sherratt 2000). In fact, the various bits of decorated wall relief Evans used to piece this image together came from different archaeological strata, and probably never belonged to a single figure (he himself thought this to begin with, but changed his mind). Even the gender of the priest-king is now questioned by art historians. But the more basic question is why anybody would want to seize on a single, possibly male figure with an impressive plumed hat as evidence for kingship, when the overwhelming majority of Minoan pictorial art is pointing us in another direction altogether. We will follow it in a moment. But in short, the priest-king of Knossos is no better contender for a throne than his similarly named and similarly isolated counterpart at the earlier Bronze Age city of Mohenjo-daro in the Indus valley, whom we encountered in [Chapter Eight](#).
147. Younger 2016.
148. 'It is certain', Evans wrote, 'that, however much the male element had asserted itself in the domain of government by the great days of Minoan Civilization, the stamp of Religion still continued to reflect the older matriarchal stage of social development.' (cited in Schoep 2018: 21)
149. For a detailed discussion of early Egyptian imports to Crete, via Lebanon, and their likely association with women's rituals see Wengrow 2010b.
150. Voutsaki 1997.
151. Palaces only called in tribute on certain specific goods – such as flax, wool and metals – which were converted into a still more specific range of items in palace workshops, mainly fine textiles, chariots, weapons and scented oils. Other major industries, such as pottery manufacture, are entirely missing from the administrative records. See Whitelaw 2001.

152. See Bennett 2001; S. Sherratt 2001.
153. Kilian 1988.
154. Rehak 2002.
155. Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951.

11. FULL CIRCLE

1. Uncultivated, quite literally, for as Montesquieu put it, perhaps most succinctly: ‘These people enjoy great liberty; for as they do not cultivate the earth, they are not fixed: they are wanderers and vagabonds ...’ (*Spirit of the Laws*, 18: 14 – ‘Of the political State of the People who do not cultivate the Land’).
2. Lovejoy and Boas 1965.
3. Scott 2017: 129–30.
4. Ibid.: 135.
5. Ibid.: 253.
6. Sahlins and Service 1960.
7. The closest we have to a historical comparison is economic: the Socialist Bloc, which existed from roughly 1917 to 1991 and at its peak encompassed a fair amount of the world’s land mass and population, is often treated as a (failed) experiment in this sense. But some would argue that it was never really independent from the larger capitalist world system, but simply a subdivision of state capitalism.
8. We are drawing here on examples discussed at greater length in *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (Graeber 2011: Chapter Nine), which describes these co-ordinated changes largely in terms of the alternation between physical (gold and silver) currency and various forms of abstract (intangible) credit money.
9. For a general overview of Cahokia see Pauketat 2009.
10. Williams 1990.
11. Severi (2015) discusses evidence for the use of pictographic writing systems among the indigenous peoples of North America,

and why their characterization as ‘oral’ societies is misleading in many ways.

12. *JR* (1645–6) 30: 47; see also Delâge 1993: 74.
13. Carr et al. 2008.
14. Knight 2001; 2006.
15. Sherwood and Kidder 2011.
16. ‘The Archaic measuring unit appears to have survived into the Adena period ... but Woodland peoples employed a different system of measurement and geometric forms ... derived, at least in part, from Formative Mesoamerica ... The system used a shorter measuring cord (1.544 m) for the Standard Unit and its permutations, but it otherwise preserved many of the traditional counts and arithmetic ... Also, reliance on triangles was replaced by the use of square grids, and circles and squares, at various SMU [Standard Macro Unit] increments, as is so evident in Hopewell earthwork.’ (Clark 2004: 205, with further references)
17. Yerkes 2005: 245.
18. Specialists have come to refer to this as the *Pax Hopewelliana*; for a general review, as well some occasional exceptions in the form of trophy skulls, see Seeman 1988.
19. See Carr and Case (eds) 2005; Case and Carr (eds) 2008: *passim*.
20. Contemporary scholars list at least nine clans among the ‘Tripartite Alliance’ of sodalities in the central Hopewell region: Bear, Canine, Feline, Raptor, Raccoon, Elk, Beaver, Nonraptorial Bird and Fox. These correspond roughly to the largest clans documented among Central Algonkian peoples who still inhabit the region (Carr 2005; Thomas et al. 2005: 339–40).
21. As one might imagine, this has been a matter of some debate, but we follow here the extensively documented views put forward in Carr and Case (eds) 2005, with further detailed references.
22. DeBoer 1997: 232: ‘I view Hopewell earthwork sites as ceremonial centres, places where various activities, including mortuary rituals and other activities such as feasts, causeway-directed foot races and other “games,” as well as dances and

gambling were conducted periodically in the absence of large permanent populations resident at the centres themselves.’ On burial: Seaman 1979.

23. See Coon (2009) on the north/south distinction; he also notes that in the south, burials are mostly collective and undifferentiated, and treasures are buried apart from bodies, not identified with specific individuals. The art shows figures in costume, dressed as monsters, rather than individuals wearing headdresses as at Hopewell. All this suggests a more self-consciously egalitarian, or at least anti-heroic, ideology in the south. On the pairing of shamanic and earth shrine sites see DeBoer 1997; on gender and office see Field, Goldberg and Lee 2005; Rodrigues 2005. Carr (in Carr and Case 2005: 112) speculates that the north/south division might reflect a distinction between the ancestors of later, patrilineal Great Lakes Algonkians and the matrilineal Southeastern societies (Cree, Cherokee, Choctaw, etc); but the pattern reflected in tombs seems far more radical: aside from some male mortuary priests, all major office holders in the south appear to be women. Rodrigues’s (2005) analysis of skeletal remains suggests even more surprising differences in the south, where ‘women also participated in maintenance and subsistence activities more commonly done by Native American men, including flint knapping and running possibly involved in hunting. Inversely, men shared in processing plant foods, stereotypically associated with women.’ (Carr, in Case and Carr eds 2008: 248). It is rather surprising that these findings have not been more broadly discussed.
24. On the causeway: Lepper 1997.
25. As we discussed in [Chapter Four](#), the monumental hunter-gatherer centre of Poverty Point on the Lower Mississippi drew in objects and materials from a similarly wide region almost 2,000 years earlier, and it may well have disseminated various forms of intangible goods and knowledge far and wide in return; but Poverty Point had a different character to Hopewell, tightly focused on a single centre of gravity, and less clearly marked by

the spread of social institutions such as burial rituals or settlement patterns.

26. Between 3500 and 3200 BC a cultural spread of similar scope, but very different character, also preceded the emergence of the first large territorial kingdom in Egypt; this is often referred to in the literature as a ‘cultural unification’ that preceded political unification, although in fact much of that unification between the valley and delta of the Nile seems to have been confined to the sphere of funerary rituals and their associated forms of personal display (Wengrow 2006: 38, 89).
27. Seeman 2004: 58–61.
28. For a more detailed argument on these lines see Braun (1986).
29. DeBoer 1997.
30. Hudson 1976: *passim*. Residents of New York City might be interested to know that Broadway was originally an Indian road, and that Astor Place, where it begins, was the shared lacrosse field for the three nations that occupied Manhattan.
31. On Rattlesnake Causeway and mound and the origins of Cahokia see Baires 2014; 2015; on Cahokia’s beginnings as place of pilgrimage, Skousen 2016.
32. Chunkey appears to have been modelled on a popular children’s game called Hoop and Pole. On the origins of chunkey and its later role see DeBoer 1993; Pauketat 2009: Chapter Four.
33. A later observer of the Choctaw recorded: ‘Their favorite game of chunké ... they play from morning till night, with an unwearied application, and they bet high; here you may see a savage come and bring all his skins, stake them and lose them; next his pipe, his beads, trinkets and ornaments; at last his blankets and other garments, and even all their arms, and after all it is not uncommon for them to go home, borrow a gun and shoot themselves.’ (Romans, cited in Swanton 1931: 156–7). At the time of European contact, such extreme sports seem to have acted as a levelling mechanism, since few stayed on top for long and even those who sold themselves don’t seem to have remained that way for very long.

34. Pauketat 2009: 20. The literature on Cahokia is vast. In addition to the general overviews we have already cited see also Alt 2018; Byers 2006; Emerson 1997a; Fowler 1997; Milner 1998; Pauketat 1994; 2004; and essays in Emerson and Lewis 1991; Pauketat and Emerson (eds) 1997; for the environmental context, Benson et al. 2009; Woods 2004.
35. Emerson et al. 2018.
36. Smith 1992: 17.
37. Emerson 1997a; 1997b: 187; cf. Alt 2018. Pauketat et al. (2015: 446) refer to this as a process of ‘ruralization’.
38. Betzenhauser and Pauketat 2019. As Emerson notes (1997b), between AD 1050 and 1200, surveillance was also extended into the countryside through the establishment of what he terms ‘civic nodes’, which seem to have performed a mixture of ritual and managerial functions; see also Pauketat et al. 2015: 446–7.
39. Originally identified as the central burial of two males, flanked by retainers; but see now Emerson et al. 2016 for the true complexity of this deposit, which lies within the tumulus known to archaeologists as Mound 72, some way south of the Great Plaza.
40. Fowler et al. 1999 reported the mass graves as all-female, but in fact the picture is again more complex; see now Ambrose et al. 2003; Thompson et al. 2015.
41. Knight 1986; 1989; Knight et al. 2011; Pauketat 2009: Chapter Four; for other possible readings of the bird-man symbolism see Emerson et al. 2016.
42. Emerson 2007; 2012.
43. The precise reasons behind Cahokia’s collapse are hotly contested; for a range of views see Emerson and Headman 2014; Kelly 2008, with further references.
44. See Cobb and Butler 2002.
45. For a range of views on the latter issue, compare Holt 2009; Pauketat 2007; and see also Milner 1998.
46. For which, at Cahokia, see Smith 1992; Pauketat 2013.

47. Cf. Pauketat et al. 2015: 452.
48. La Flesche 1921: 62–3; Rollings 1992: 28; Edwards 2010: 17.
49. See King 2003.
50. King 2003; 2004; 2007; Cobb and King 2005.
51. In Clayton et al. (eds) 1993: 92–3.
52. As argued in Ethridge 2010.
53. Ibid.: 33–7, 74–7. The indigenous forms of republican government that emerged in the Southeast during the eighteenth century also presumed a certain relationship with nature, but this was in no sense one of harmony. Ultimately, it was a relation of war. Plants were human allies and animals were enemies; killing prey without following correct ritual formula was a violation of the laws of war, which would cause animals to send disease into human communities by way of revenge. Yet at the same time the business of hunting tended to be understood, especially by men, as representing a certain ideal of individual freedom.
54. Ibid.: 82–3.
55. The argument was put forward by Waskelov and Dumas but never published; it's cited and discussed in Ethridge (2010: 83–4) and Stern (2017: 33), though in our opinion it makes the whole case backwards, seeing the 'creation of new coalescent communities [and] ... emergence of a more egalitarian, consensus-based social structure' in the face of disasters caused by the European invasion, and only then the emergence of a new cosmology whose symbol was the looped square, representing the council-ground as the universe, as a sort of adaptation to this 'new reality'. But how could self-conscious ideals of egalitarianism have emerged and been adopted at all, except through some sort of cosmological expression?
56. Fogelson 1984. There were, as Fogelson notes, and as we'll soon see, Cherokee priests in the seventeenth century, though they were gradually replaced by individual curers. It's hard not to see the legend as to some degree reflecting real historical events: Etowah, for instance, was in what later became Cherokee territory.

57. Coffee itself was first cultivated either in Ethiopia or Yemen; the American equivalent was called ‘the Black Drink’ and traces back to at least Hopewell times, when it was used in intense doses for ritual purposes (Hudson 1979; Crown et al. 2012). On Creek daily gatherings: Hahn 2004; Fairbanks 1979.
58. Brebeuf in *JR* 10: 219.
59. Certainly, the emerging soft drug regime in Europe – which was in many ways also the foundation of the emerging world economy of the time (founded, first on the spice trade, then on the drug, arms and slave trades), was quite different, since it focused so much on new regimes of work. While in the Middle Ages almost everyone had consumed mild intoxicants like wine or beer on a daily basis, the new regime saw a division between mild drugs meant to facilitate work – coffee and tea, especially used as vehicles for sugar, along with tobacco – and hard liquor for the weekends (see various contributions in Goodman, Lovejoy and Sherratt eds 1995).
60. In our terms, it’s not even clear that Adena-Hopewell was a ‘first-order regime of domination’; in most respects, as we’ve indicated, it seems closer to the kind of grand hospitality zones, culture areas, interaction spheres, or civilizations we’ve encountered so many times before in other parts of the world.
61. See Kehoe (2007) for an extensive comparison of ethno-historical data on the Osage with Cahokian archaeology (also Hall 1997). Their exact relationship with Cahokia is not archaeologically clear, however, and Robert Cook (2017) supplies the most recent breakdown of their origins in Fort Ancient, a Mississippianized region of central Ohio whose population seems to have interacted with the Cahokian heartland (see especially, pp. 141–2, 162–3).
62. La Flesche 1930: 530; Rollings 1992: 29–30; Bailey and La Flesche 1995: 60–62.
63. La Flesche 1921: 51.
64. Rollings 1992: 38; Edwards 2010.

65. La Flesche (1921: 48–9) writes: ‘In the course of this study of the Osage tribe, covering a number of years, it was learned from some of the older members of the *Nohozhinga* of the present day that, aside from the formulated rites handed down by the men of the olden days who had delved into the mysteries of nature and of life, stories also came down in traditional form telling of the manner in which these seers conducted their deliberations. The story that seemed most to impress the Nohozhinga of today is the one telling of how those men, those students of nature, gradually drifted into an organized association that became known by the name *Nohozhinga*, Little-Old-Men. As time went on this association found a home in the house of a man who had won, by his kindness and hospitality, the affection of his people ... Since that time it has been regarded by prominent men as an honor to entertain them.’
66. La Flesche 1939: 34.
67. See above, n.1; and also Burns 2004: 37–8, 362. Burns himself is of partly Osage descent and was brought up as Osage. We find it striking how regularly indigenous authors are open to the possibility that such dialogues were two-way, and how quickly European historians, or Americans of European descent, dismiss any such suggestions as preposterous and effectively shut them down.
68. Parker 1916: 17; italics ours. It’s interesting to note that some early sources, like Josiah Clark, refer to the later figure of Adodharoh as ‘the king’, though alternatively as ‘principal civil affairs officer of the confederacy’ (in Henige 1999: 134–5).
69. It is worthy of note here that Arthur Parker describes Iroquois witches of his day as essentially those who have the power to turn themselves into monstrous beasts, and at the same time to bend others to their will through telepathic commands (Parker 1912: 27–8 n.2; cf. Smith 1888; Dennis 1993: 90–94; Shimony 1961: 261–88; 1970; Tooker 1964: 117–20). Mann also emphasizes the political nature of the designation: ‘the closest Iroquoian thought comes to European witchcraft is a general disgust with anyone who uses [charms] in an underhanded way, to trick another person

into behaviour that is neither voluntary nor self-directed' (Mann 2000: 318; cf. Graeber 1996 for a similar case in Madagascar, also focusing on love magic).

70. We are thinking here, particularly, of the arguments made by Robert Lowie and Pierre Clastres, discussed at various points in our earlier chapters.
71. For instance, the Haudenosaunee also claimed they were descended from a population of escaped serfs, subjugated by a numerically superior enemy whom they called the Adirondaks ('Barkeaters') (Holm 2002: 160). Subjugation and insurrection were in no sense entirely alien concepts here.
72. Trigger 1990: 136–7.
73. Ibid.: 137.
74. Fremin in Wallace (1958: 235): 'The Iroquois have, properly speaking, only a single Divinity – the dream. To it they render their submission, and follow all its orders with the utmost exactness. The Tsonnontouens [Seneca] are more attached to this superstition than any of the others; their Religion in this respect becomes even a matter of scruple; whatever it be that they think they have done in their dreams, they believe themselves absolutely obliged to execute at the earliest moment. The other nations content themselves with observing those of their dreams which are the most important; but this people, which has the reputation of living more religiously than its neighbors, would think itself guilty of a great crime if it failed in its observance of a single dream. The people think only of that, they talk about nothing else, and all their cabins are filled with their dreams ... Some have been known to go as far as Quebec, traveling a hundred and fifty leagues, for the sake of getting a dog, that they had dreamed of buying there ...'. Wallace argues that this is a direct psychological consequence of the stoicism and importance of personal freedom and autonomy in Iroquoian societies. See also Blau 1963; Graeber 2001: 136–9.
75. The earlier dates are in reference to an eclipse mentioned in the foundation text (Mann and Fields 1997; cf. Henige 1999; Snow 1991; Atkins 2002; Starna 2008).

76. For the general state of archaeological understanding see Tuck 1978; Bamann et al. 1992; Engelbrecht 2003; Birch 2015. On the Ontario inception of maize cultivation: Johansen and Mann 2000: 119–20.
77. Mann and Fields 1997: 122–3; Johansen and Mann 2000: 278–9.
78. See [Chapter Six](#).
79. Morgan 1851; Beauchamp 1907; Fenton 1949; 1998; Tooker 1978; on the role of women specifically: Brown 1970; Tooker 1984; Mann 1997; 1998; 2000.
80. Jamieson 1992: 74.
81. In Noble 1985: 133, cf. 1978: 161. There is some debate over how seriously to take the missionary claims about Tsouharissen: Trigger (1985: 223) for instance insists he was simply an unusually prominent war chief, but the preponderance of anthropological opinion seems weighted towards seeing the Neutral as a ‘simple chiefdom’.
82. Noble 1985: 134–42.
83. Parker 1919: 16, 30–32.
84. Lahontan 1990 [1703]: 122–4.
85. The story is told in some detail in Mann 2000: 146–52.

12. CONCLUSION

1. Sometimes he also used the phrase *illud tempus*; see, among many other works, Eliade 1959.
2. Hocart 1954: 77; see also Hocart 1969 [1927]; 1970 [1936].
3. On reflection, many of what we consider to be quintessential freedoms – such as ‘freedom of speech’ or ‘the pursuit of happiness’ – are not really *social* freedoms at all. You can be free to say whatever you like, but if nobody cares or listens, it hardly matters. Equally, you can be as happy as you like, but if that happiness comes at the price of another’s misery, it hardly amounts to much either. Arguably, the things often quoted as quintessential freedoms are based on the very illusion created by

Rousseau in his second *Discourse*: the illusion of a human life that is solitary.

4. For which see Graeber and Sahlins 2017: *passim*.
5. Harari 2014: 133.
6. Scarry 1985.
7. Kelly 2000.
8. See Haas and Piscitelli 2013.
9. Patterson 1982.
10. For further discussion see Graeber 2011: 198–201 and the sources cited there.
11. One might imagine these public torments as wild or disorderly in their conduct; but in fact the preparation of a prisoner for sacrifice was one of the few occasions on which an office holder might issue commands for calm and orderly behaviour, as well as forbidding sexual intercourse. For all of the above see Trigger 1976: 68–75.
12. For a period of perhaps five centuries or more, human remains across the whole of Eastern North America display remarkably little evidence of traumatic injuries, scalping or other forms of interpersonal violence (Milner et al. 2013). Evidence for interpersonal violence and warfare exists in both earlier and later periods, the most famous later examples being a mass grave excavated at Crow Creek and an Oneota village cemetery with extensive evidence of trauma, both dating to around 700 years ago. Such evidence accounts for perhaps a few decades or more of social history – a century at most – and is fairly localized. There is absolutely no reason to believe that the entire region somehow existed in a Hobbesian state for millennia, as contemporary theorists of violence blandly assume.
13. Delâge 1993: 65–6.
14. See Merrick 1991.
15. In a (1995) article that has undoubtedly been influential, but still not nearly as influential as it deserves, Crumley pointed out the need for alternatives to hierarchical models of social complexity

in archaeological interpretation. As she noted, the archaeological record is full of evidence for the development of social and ecological systems that were complex and highly structured, just not according to hierarchical principles. ‘Heterarchy’ – the umbrella term she introduced for those other types of systems – was borrowed from cognitive science. Many of the societies we’ve focused on in this book – from Upper Palaeolithic mammoth hunters to the shifting coalitions and confederacies of sixteenth-century Iroquoia – could be described in these terms (had we chosen to adopt the language of systems theory), on the basis that power was dispersed or distributed in flexible ways across different elements of society, or at different scales of integration, or indeed across different times of year within the same society.

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