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BETWEEN THE COMMUNITY AND THE STATE
THE MIDDLE-RANGE SOCIETIES OF NUCLEAR AMERICA AND
THE NEAR EAST IN HISTORICAL DYNAMICS

The economic, technological and demographic parameters of the middle-range and early state societies in Nuclear America, on one side, and in the Middle East, on the other side, were much less distinct than their sociopolitical characteristics. The predominant approach to the study of all these societies (with the important exception of K. Makowski's) is to apply to them notions and terms elaborated on the base of ethnographic materials and visualized as universal and suitable for any region and time. However, the precise reconstruction of prehistoric sociopolitical systems using the archaeological data alone is hardly possible. It is more reliable to follow a purely "etic" approach and not to compare the archaeologically visible evidence of complexity with the data of anthropology, but to analyze the differences between the archaeological materials themselves, according to epochs and regions. Among recognized categories of archaeological data that can be taken as proxies for sociopolitical complexity are the corporate architecture, big settlements, rich burials and three or four levels in settlement patterns, either alone or in any combination. The precise parameters, like a particular volume of monumental structures, or a particular size of settlements can be established only provisionally. The most important factor is the general trajectory of their change. An overview of the evidence in favor of sociopolitical complexity for Nuclear America from Costa Rica to Bolivia (ca. 3000 cal. B.C. – A.D. 1500) and for Mesopotamia, the Levant and part of Anatolia (ca. cal. 9500 B.C. – 3000 B.C.) is suggested. Among the traits that make the American societies so different from the Near Eastern ones are the size of monumental constructions and the value of burial goods. These are disproportionately large in relation to their assessed demographic parameters. In America the number of known prehistoric objects decorated with figurative representations is hundreds if not thousands of times greater than their number for the Near Eastern cultures before 3000 cal. B.C. The use of

strong hallucinogens by the high elite and trophy heads in the hands of warriors are important icons of American art completely unknown in the prehistoric Near East. It is supposed that in America the major tools used by the elites to consolidate their power were control over the distribution of prestige goods (“wealth finance”) and over esoteric knowledge, while in the Near East it was mostly control over production and distribution of staples (“staple finance”). Some Near Eastern societies (first of all Göbekli Tepe and the pre-Uruk IV Susiana) seem to better fit the American than the Near Eastern patterns but they have remained exceptions for their region. The peculiarities demonstrated by the American complex societies can be related to the existence of dual organization, the “return of the ancestors” rituals and possibly to the feasts of merit. All these social institutions can function both in chiefdoms or in states and in small communities with social inequality based exclusively on gender and age. The ways of the sociopolitical development in Nuclear America and in the Near East had to have diverged long before the first evidence of complexity becomes visible, possibly even before the ancestors of the American natives migrated to the New World.