

Beyond Chiefdoms: Pathways to Complexity in Africa

Recent critiques of neo-evolutionary formulations that focus primarily on the development of powerful hierarchies have called for a broadening of the empirical base for complex society studies. Redressing the neglect of sub-Saharan examples in comparative discussions on complex society, this book considers how case material from the subcontinent can enhance our understanding of the nature, origins, and development of complexity. The archaeological, historical, and anthropological case materials are relevant to a number of recent concerns, revealing how complexity has emerged and developed in a variety of ways. Contributors engage important theoretical issues, including the continuing influence of deeply embedded evolutionary notions in archaeological concepts of complexity, the importance of alternative modes of complex organization – such as flexible hierarchies, multiple overlapping hierarchies, and horizontal differentiation – and the significance of different forms of power. The distinguished list of contributors includes historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists.

SUSAN KEECH MCINTOSH is Professor of Anthropology at Rice University, USA. She has conducted archaeological research in Mali, Senegal, and Ghana, and is co-author of two monographs on Jenné-jeno, Mali, widely recognized as the earliest urban site documented in sub-Saharan Africa.

Cambridge University Press
052102269X - Beyond Chiefdoms: Pathways to Complexity in Africa
Edited by Susan Keech McIntosh
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

NEW DIRECTIONS IN ARCHAEOLOGY

Editors

Françoise Audouze
Centre de Recherches Archéologiques, Nanterre, France

Cyprian Broodbank
Institute of Archaeology, University College, London

Tim Murray
*Department of Archaeology, La Trobe University, Victoria,
Australia*

Colin Renfrew
*McDonald Institute of Archaeological Research, University of
Cambridge*

Andrew Sherratt
Department of Antiquities, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Timothy Taylor
Department of Archaeology, University of Bradford

Norman Yoffee
Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan

Wendy Ashmore
Department of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania

Nathan Schlanger
Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge

Cambridge University Press
052102269X - Beyond Chiefdoms: Pathways to Complexity in Africa
Edited by Susan Keech McIntosh
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Beyond Chiefdoms

Pathways to Complexity in Africa

Edited by
SUSAN KEECH McINTOSH



Cambridge University Press
052102269X - Beyond Chiefdoms: Pathways to Complexity in Africa
Edited by Susan Keech McIntosh
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521630740

© Susan Keech McIntosh 1999

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1999
This digitally printed first paperback version 2005

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

African perspectives on political complexity / edited by Susan Keech McIntosh

p. cm.

1. Political anthropology – Africa. 2. Social archaeology – Africa.
3. Archaeology and state – Africa. 4. Africa – Politics and government. 5. Africa – Antiquities. I. McIntosh, Susan Keech.
GN645.A367 1999

306.2'096–dc21 98-38081 CIP

ISBN-13 978-0-521-63074-0 hardback
ISBN-10 0-521-63074-6 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-02269-9 paperback
ISBN-10 0-521-02269-X paperback

Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	page vi	8 Wonderful society: the Burgess Shale creatures, Mandara polities, and the nature of prehistory	97
<i>List of tables</i>	vii	<i>Nicholas David and Judy Sterner</i>	
<i>List of contributors</i>	viii	9 Material culture and the dialectics of identity in the Kalahari: AD 700–1700	110
<i>Preface</i>	ix	<i>James Denbow</i>	
1 Pathways to complexity: an African perspective	1	10 Seeking and keeping power in Bunyoro-Kitara, Uganda	124
<i>Susan Keech McIntosh</i>		<i>Peter Robertshaw</i>	
2 The segmentary state and the ritual phase in political economy	31	11 The (in)visible roots of Bunyoro-Kitara and Buganda in the Lakes region: AD 800–1300	136
<i>Aidan Southall</i>		<i>David L. Schoenbrun</i>	
3 Perceiving variability in time and space: the evolutionary mapping of African societies	39	12 The power of symbols and the symbols of power through time: probing the Luba past	151
<i>Ann B. Stahl</i>		<i>Pierre de Maret</i>	
4 Western representations of urbanism and invisible African towns	56	13 Pathways of political development in equatorial Africa and neo-evolutionary theory	166
<i>Roderick J. McIntosh</i>		<i>Jan Vansina</i>	
5 Modeling political organization in large-scale settlement clusters: a case study from the Inland Niger Delta	66	<i>Index</i>	173
<i>Susan Keech McIntosh</i>			
6 Sacred centers and urbanization in West Central Africa	80		
<i>Raymond N. Asombang</i>			
7 Permutations in patrimonialism and populism: the Aghem chiefdoms of Western Cameroon	88		
<i>Igor Kopytoff</i>			

Figures

1.1	Afikpo village group.	page 10	9.2	Plan map of the Kgaswe excavations.	112
1.2	Reconstruction of the Igbo Ukwu burial.	13	9.3	Proportions of wild and domestic fauna at some Kalahari sites.	113
1.3	Reconstruction of ritual deposit at Igbo Ukwu.	14	9.4	Map of Bosutswe surface features.	115
5.1	The Inland Niger Delta of West Africa: the Jenné region.	67	9.5	Makgadikgadi ruins.	118
5.2	The location of levees and deep basins in the Inland Niger Delta.	69	9.6	Comparison of Tsodilo faunal assemblages.	120
5.3	Distribution of archaeological sites in reference to various landforms.	72	10.1	Western Uganda showing the location of earthworks and other major sites.	125
5.4	Rank-size distributions of archaeological sites occupied in AD 1000 within 4 km of Jenné-jeno and the present-day settlements of the same area.	73	10.2	The location of Cwezi shrines.	128
5.5	Settlement hierarchy in the maximal site cluster around Jenné-jeno.	74	11.1	Map of the Great Lakes region showing language groups mentioned in text and archaeological sites.	138
6.1	Cameroon, showing location of Bafut.	81	11.2	Great Lakes Bantu and its subgroups.	143
6.2	The <i>neubah</i> monolith at the <i>nsani</i> of the Njibujang village.	83	12.1	The Upemba Depression: archaeological sites mentioned in the text.	153
6.3	The Takumbang shrine (<i>ndere</i>) in the dance plaza outside the palace.	83	12.2	Archaeological sequence for the northern Upemba Depression.	154
6.4	A fetish placed across the road to block witches and other evil spirits.	84	12.3	Early Kisalian burial of a man with ceremonial axe and anvil, an iron machete, and copper jewelry.	156
8.1	a) Increase in overall diversity through time; b) Contrasting increase and decrease in disparity and diversity through time.	97	12.4	Ceramics from the northern Upemba Depression, showing continuity and change through time.	160
8.2	The Mandara highlands and surrounding plains, with larger towns and main ethno-linguistic groupings.	100	13.1	Equatorial Africa.	167
8.3	The northern Mandara highlands: larger towns, ethno-linguistic groupings, and selected pre-colonial polities.	102			
9.1	Sites mentioned in text.	111			

Tables

1.1	Social stratification in Polynesia.	<i>page 5</i>
1.2	Major elements of the dual processual model.	18
5.1	Sequence of development at Jenné-jeno, reconstructed from excavation	70
5.2	Possible range of population at Jenné-jeno AD 800–1000.	73
8.1	Traditional dimensions of chiefly power in Sirak, Mofu-Diamaré princedoms, and Sukur.	105
11.1	A semantogram for five terms for power in Bantu.	140
11.2	A semantogram for five terms for social organization and space in Bantu.	142

Contributors

RAYMOND ASOMBANG
Department of Arts and Archaeology
University of Yaoundé
Cameroon

NICHOLAS DAVID
Department of Archaeology
University of Calgary

JUDY STERNER
University of Calgary

JAMES DENBOW
Department of Anthropology
University of Texas at Austin

IGOR KOPYTOFF
Department of Anthropology
University of Pennsylvania

PIERRE DE MARET
Université Libre de Bruxelles
Belgium

RODERICK MCINTOSH
Department of Anthropology
Rice University

SUSAN KEECH MCINTOSH
Department of Anthropology
Rice University

PETER ROBERTSHAW
Department of Anthropology
California State University, San Bernardino

DAVID SCHOENBRUN
Department of History
University of Georgia

AIDAN SOUTHALL
Department of Anthropology
University of Wisconsin, Madison

ANN B. STAHL
Department of Anthropology
State University of New York, Binghamton

JAN VANSINA
Departments of Anthropology and History
University of Wisconsin

Preface

This book project had its origins in my own frustration at the paucity of African models, African-inspired theories, and African case studies in the archaeological literature on the development of complexity. When Antonio Gilman asked me to organize an archaeology session at the 1992 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in San Francisco, I used the opportunity to showcase what that continent has to offer to ongoing debates about the origin and nature of complex societies. If archaeology was to live up to its claims to be a comparative discipline, it needed to take Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, seriously and systematically into account.

The papers at the invited session entitled “Intermediate-level Societies in Africa: Archaeological and Anthropological Insights” ranged widely over the continent and included presentations by anthropologists and historians as well as archaeologists. A number of the papers in this volume (those by Southall, S. McIntosh, Schoenbrun, Robertshaw, and Denbow) were originally presented at this session. Igor Kopytoff was also scheduled to participate, but circumstances prevented it. Fekri Hassan participated in the session, but in view of the strongly sub-Saharan focus of the rest of the papers, it was decided to strengthen that focus for publication and exclude ancient Egypt – arguably the best-known African complex society. Subsequently, papers presented by Ann Stahl and Nic David at the Complex Society Group’s meeting in San Bernardino in October 1995 were added, and additional papers solicited. Not all of the additionally solicited papers actually materialized, leaving the coverage of some themes and areas envisioned for inclusion rather threadbare. But even in ideal circumstances, it is

unlikely that any group of twelve authors could adequately represent the various regions of a subcontinent two to three times larger than the contiguous United States, let alone satisfy everyone’s wish list for gender, national, ethnic, and disciplinary diversity among the contributors. In the end, it seemed enough to provide some sense of the variety of anthropological, historical, and archaeological case materials available for the study of complexity in Africa, selected with an eye to their resonance with certain themes that have emerged in the recent archaeological literature.

I am indebted to all the people who read part or all of my introductory essay in preliminary or more advanced draft and provided useful, encouraging and/or cautionary remarks: Nic David, Brian Fagan, Antonio Gilman, Stephen Houston, Ben Nelson, Simon Ottenberg, Thurstan Shaw, Aidan Southall, and Ann Stahl. My debt is particularly large to those stalwart individuals who read through more than one draft version: Tim Earle, Igor Kopytoff, Rod McIntosh, Pete Robertshaw, David Schoenbrun, and Jan Vansina. Although I have not patched all the holes that they found, I am deeply grateful for the collegiality, insightful comments and editorial surveillance. The chapter was significantly improved as a result of their input. Thanks also go to Joe Tainter for long and thought-provoking conversations about complexity along the road between Bandelier and Jemez as well as in Albuquerque.

Four people in particular encouraged me to move ahead with publishing this collection: Ivan Karp (who suggested a more anthropological, rather than archaeological, orientation for the volume, however); Ann Stahl, who uttered just the right words at a critical juncture in

1994; Norman Yoffee, who encouraged me to take the project to Cambridge University Press; and Rod McIntosh, who provided endless support and childcare while I wrestled with the introduction and editorial tasks. I am grateful for their confidence in the project. My children, Alex and Annick, graciously forbore my absences and preoccupation with “the book,” but have made it quite clear that they don’t need another book project in my future any time soon!

More than anything, the completion of this volume is a testimony to my long-time research collaboration with my husband, Rod McIntosh, who first suggested almost two decades ago that standard neo-evolutionary models for the development of complexity did not easily accommodate the massive mound complex of Jenné-jeno, where we began fieldwork together in 1977. In the intervening years, as chiefdom studies were on the ascendant and hierarchy was on everyone’s lips, it seemed quixotic at times to continue to develop the idea that a settlement cluster on the scale of Jenné-jeno was not centrally organized under a paramount chief. Isolated as we were in a department with no other archaeologists, we each served

as the other’s major source of support in the belief that alternative models for complex social organization were necessary for archaeology to fulfill its promise as a comparative discipline. Africa’s role in this project would necessarily be a large one, we felt. But the time was not yet right.

With the rise of interest in multiple sources of power (as the influence of Foucault gradually trickles into the mainstream of archaeology) in the 1990s, a more receptive climate for such ideas seems to be emerging. People who work on complex societies far from the traditional areas (Maya, Peru, Europe, Polynesia, Mesopotamia) that have historically dominated discussions on complexity now share a sense that archaeological discourse on complexity has expanded considerably to include a much greater range of variation in patterns and trajectories of complexity. There is a sense, articulated in the title of a session at the 1998 Society for American Archaeology meeting in Seattle, that the discussion of non-hierarchical models of complexity need no longer be conducted in whispers. Perhaps, then, the time is finally right for a book such as this.