

**The
EARLY
STATE,
ITS ALTERNATIVES
and
ANALOGUES**



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*The Transition to Statehood in Central Europe**

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The traditional European approach to the origin of states involves questions relating to the appearance of nation states during the Middle Ages. Historians and archaeologists alike support this approach by quoting dates of historical events to emphasize the 'birth' of a state.

I undertake a different approach. The main focus is on the state formation process as a universally linked sequence of socio-economic and political events. This process should be identifiable by a distinctive pattern of episodes displayed in archaeological data through a certain set of features.

INTRODUCTION

Following Wright's (1984: 41) remark that specialized and hierarchically organized agencies of control did not arise abruptly from a context of small independent egalitarian communities, I will try to point out to some key elements of the state formation process in Central Europe that could be observed in archaeological records. The empirical basis for this presentation is supported by the information published in Poland (cf. Leciejewicz 1989; Gassowski 1985, 1993; Kurnatowska and Kurnatowski 1983). I am fully aware of the epistemological limitations of my database, that I have assembled relying on records collected and published by different scholars. However, my presentation neither aims to fully elaborate on the state formation process in Central Europe, nor its chronological context (some difficulties in chronological assessments of the Middle Ages in European Plains have been recently reported by Gassowski 1994 and by Dulnicz 1994). A detailed study on the subject is still under preparation (Lozny forthcoming).

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My intention is to emphasize the unique role of archaeology in studying the origin of states. I consider a state as a dynamic formation regulated by a set of specific laws and rules. Its structure includes definable elements interacting with each other through time and space. Elements of such a structure should be identifiable through the archaeological record. Therefore, archaeologists may supply significant data to study the origin of states.

As usual, though, it is all in what questions we ask and how can we answer them. In my presentation I shall focus on a settlement hierarchy and its pattern as the prime indicators of the state formation process. The assumption is that a settlement pattern of an area resembles social complexity of the time.

Therefore, different settlement patterns will be managed by populations of socially and economically diverse complexity. Less complex settlement structures comprise one category of sites or a small group of sites most distinguishable from the others because of their size. More complex settlement patterns will be represented by three or more groups of sites of different size. As demonstrated by Gregory A. Johnson (cf. 1980, 1981, 1987), when plotted on graphs, these patterns show different rank-size distributions: (1) bimodal for prestate (chiefdom) stage, and (2) trimodal (or more complex) for state structures. The approach I am presenting was deeply influenced by Gregory A. Johnson's concept of hierarchization in the decision-making process and the rank-size rule method he applied to study the Susiana complexity (Johnson 1980, 1981, 1987).

Two groups of questions concerning the state formation process in the Western Slavia have recently been presented by Leciejewicz (1989: 124): (1) the premises and conditions of transformation, and (2) the extent to which the state formation process was based on local tradition and what elements were adapted from the other European states of the time. I shall focus on the first group of questions, and discuss the possible conditions and their archaeological manifestations, under which the state formative process occurred in Central Europe between the 8th - 10th centuries A.D.

THE PRIMARY ELEMENTS OF THE STATE FORMATIVE PROCESS

My perspective concerns the structural characteristics of the state formation process that remain within archaeological insight. If states always occur under certain circumstances, the state formation process should be identifiable by a distinctive pattern of archaeological records. A set of features such as economic structure, social status, occupational specialization, dif-

ferences in health and mortality, mortuary practices, and changes in a settlement pattern should be archaeologically recognizable when compared to the previous status quo. No single feature indicates a change of such magnitude (Patterson and Gailey 1987: 12). The aim is to simply recognize structural parts of the process of changes through time, which means those remaining within archaeological penetration. A state could also be defined by other, non structural features (Jones and Kautz 1981: 14–15). The more speculative questions, however, cannot be answered without in – depth analysis, which I do not plan to undertake now. Among them are questions such as: (1) Do states have to emerge? (2) To what extent is the appearance of a state the random outcome of historical process? (cf. Cohen 1981). The recognition of archaeological examples of such socio-political entities relies on the material consequences of the emergence of the upper class or nobility, members of which control generalized, polity-wide decision-making processes. The following three features of spatial organization are useful in identifying past complex social structures: (1) settlement hierarchy, (2) residential segregation, (3) mortuary segregation. The last category is not always clearly identified in some societies, nor does it necessarily suggest the existence of social stratification (Hodder 1986: 2–3; Patterson and Gailey 1987: 13).

Earle (1978: 12) recognizes the following features of a complex chiefdom: (1) discontinuity in rank between chiefs and commoners, (2) specialization in leadership roles, (3) increased centrality in the regional hierarchy. A complex chiefdom, is characterized by one or two levels of control hierarchy above the level of the local community (Wright 1977: 381; Feinman and Neitzel 1984: 640), while a state consists of three or more levels of control (Johnson 1982; 1987). The basic distinction between a complex chiefdom and a more advanced entity (state) is, therefore, characterized by a span of control within its decision-making hierarchy.

Johnson (1987: 107) points out to a specific set of features that characterize a state level structure:

...the Susiana settlement system consisted of a four-tier settlement size hierarchy with direct evidence of resident administrative activity at its top and bottom levels. The presence of administrative function at the intervening levels of hierarchy, and of an overall four-level administrative organization seemed likely. In combination with evidence for the centralization of craft production as part of an administered labor system, these features suggest the operation of the Middle Uruk state.

Archaeological recognition of such a complex structure should be possible by analysis of the changes in a regional settlement pattern (Johnson

1980: 250), primarily the appearance of central places surrounded by clusters of smaller villages. The largest and most centrally located sites must have functioned as primary control centers for subsidiary settlements peripheral to them. These central places would be located in regular intervals. The presence of this specific spatial arrangement gives an assumption to show another characteristic feature of state formative level, newly formed (or forming through aggregated class conflict – see Jones and Kautz 1981: 4), social stratification (Patterson and Gailey 1987: 12–13). In the following discussion I shall present a Central European complex chiefdom in contrast with the Slavic state that emerged during the 9th – 10th centuries A.D. in Wielkopolska Province in modern day Poland. Although there are probably better archaeologically recognized early Medieval chiefdoms of Central Europe, I chose the so called Samon's state as it is commonly identified as the first Slavic state. The second example, however, represents one of the best archaeologically known early Slavic state of the area.

A COMPLEX CHIEFDOM OF CENTRAL EUROPE

In the first half of the 7th century A.D. (probably in 623 – Gassowski 1964), the Slavic tribes of Bohemia and Moravia united. Samon, an outsider to the Slavic world, was commissioned the highest post, a function new to the Slavic world, the chief of the supratribal alliance. How this first Slavic 'state', as it is commonly known, came into existence has not yet been fully explained. Relying on archaeological data, we may speculate that there were two major factors behind the success: (1) economic growth, and (2) internal political stability. However, the alliance remains more as scientific hypothesis than a historical phenomenon.

The emergence of this political alliance requires further research. The idea of a supratribal structure of this 'state' was actually new in Central Europe. Its social structure could be characterized as a clan territorial alliance with autonomous local chiefs (known as dukes from later written sources) and one paramount chief (grand duke). It seems that the popular gathering of all free tribesmen was the highest form in executive and judicial decision-making hierarchy, and had controlling power over the paramount chief's legislation. This internal structure of the alliance resembles a description of a 'complex chiefdom' structure, and entirely fits within the classical definition of chiefdom: 'a chiefdom is an autonomous political unit comprising a number of villages or communities under the permanent control of a paramount chief' (Carneiro 1981: 45), which, as Earle (1987) points out: 'was rather loosely defined as a polity that organizes centrally a regional population in the thousands'.

There are two characteristic features of a chiefdom: 1) permanent control of power by a chieftain, and 2) centrally organized administration and decision-making hierarchy. Both elements may be noticed among 7th – 8th centuries petty chiefdoms of Central Europe. Therefore, I presume that the idea of a centralized form of decision-making hierarchy, has been introduced in Central Europe by that time. But despite the evidence for an alienated rank status, the power balance in decision-making within the alliance does not yet resemble a state structure. The lack of institutionalized decision-making centers and unstable leadership possibly caused failures in a redistribution system, which is considered one of the fundamental elements of a chiefdom (Renfrew 1976: 172; for further discussion see Carneiro 1981; Earle 1991; Tolstoy 1989). After Samon's death the 'state' had fallen into pieces. The internal economic ties were not developed. The alliance was a fragile supratribal structure that disappeared with the lack of a strong leadership, hierarchic administrative institutions, and, based on local sources, economic network.

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE STATE FORMATIVE PROCESS IN WESTERN SLAVIA

From the 8th to 10th centuries A.D., there had been enormous growth in the number of fortified habitations on all lands occupied by the Slavs (Leciejewicz 1983: 49). Possibly all of them represented the local seats of emerging class of nobility. Some large forts played an important role as tribal centers that later turned into protourban places. As Leciejewicz (1989: 143) points out, some of those centers lost their tribal character and turned into a unique type of settlement – so called 'urban republics'. These centers could have played major roles in the production – distribution network.

The characteristic spatial feature of these newly emerging towns was their internal division into: (1) a heavily fortified seat of a local ruler, and, (2) often also fortified, part where minor knights, merchants, and craftspeople, were accommodated. This kind of space organization confirms the appearance of a ranked social structure: (1) alienated groups of nobles/consumers, and (2) groups of commoners/producers. It also supports the suggestion (Kurnatowska and Kurnatowski 1983: 92–93) that the first function of a newly emerging town was to consolidate the power of the consumers and strengthen their control over expanding groups of producers.

All those changes occurred possibly due to the economic growth and technological modifications. Archaeological records confirm that agriculture and husbandry increased during the 9th and 10th centuries. Also, new

agrarian techniques played an important role in those changes. Extensive progress in local metallurgy, pottery-making, jewelry, and specialized technical achievement can be noticed. Two innovative features of that period (Leciejewicz 1989:127–129, 131, 138) must be stressed: (1) new technology applied to built fortifications, bridges, and houses linked with tremendous need for man power, and (2) **the origins of a monetary system**. Long distance trade highly intensified economic progress of the area. These newly emerging urban centers, however, appeared independently from the state formative process and their existence does not indicate the necessary occurrence of state societies (Crumley 1976; Kohl and Writte 1977; Leciejewicz 1989).

THE POLANIE STATE

During the 9th – 10th centuries A.D. paramount chiefs of the Polanie tribe managed to direct the state formation process to the point where one of them, **Mieszko, concluded forming the state by the second half of the 10th century A.D.** The state was formed in the area where more than 400 fortified habitation places were recorded by the so called 'Bavarian Geographer', Carolingian source of the 9th century A.D. The central place of the state was at the Goplo Lake in Wielkopolska Province. It is thought to be the first capital of Poland.

Fortified habitation sites began to appear in this area as early as the 8th century A.D. Both, geographic and economic factors played a very important role in this initial stage of the state formation process.

The first, and most significant phenomenon that can be archaeologically recorded was an increase in density and rank size distribution of the settlement pattern in Wielkopolska during the second half of the 9th and into the 10th century A.D. The number of open and fortified habitation sites increased ca. 50% as compared to the 7th – 8th centuries pattern. Demographic growth could be assumed too. The rise in number of specially fortified settlements confirms an enormous labor investment undertaken by the newly emerging state. This could not have been possible without a strong local leadership and a sufficient supply of labor. A new pattern of settlement has been created. Old local centers were abandoned and new ones emerged at quite regular intervals, with the average distance being ca. 14 km. Structurally unified and heavily fortified strongholds (2/3 – 4/5 of the entire area was covered by giant ramparts – see Kurnatowska and Kurnatowski 1983: 94), were associated with several surrounding villages.

Other types of central places, new in that region, were multicomponent

forts with monumental architecture, surrounded by a number of open habitation sites. Those places appeared in the 10th century, and were named by the Medieval chronicles as *sedes regni principales* – the seats of royal representatives. These were the provincial capitals, located ca. 25–30 km distances from each other, usually on the long distance trade trails.

The spatial arrangement of the Wielkopolska Province in the second half of the 10th century consisted of six fortified capital centers, probably ten fortified local centers, and numerous open habitation sites. Some of them were exclusively inhabited by highly specialized artisans. Those villages, so characteristic of the Slavic area, were the crucial links in the economic chain of an emerging state (Leciejewicz 1989: 165–166).

This type of settlement pattern, which included equally in rank and regularly located from each other administrative centers, was necessary for controlling a flow of information and processing and executing legislative decisions. Besides their economic functions, larger forts were, primarily, the centers of decision-making administrative hierarchies (Johnson 1980: 239). Usually, the forts were divided into two parts: (1) the ruler's seat, and (2) fortified adjacent habitation area. In Wielkopolska's case, it is not clear which of the capital forts was a permanent seat of the ruler. The likeliest scenario was that all six of them were in the same rank in accommodating both the function of a capital and the contribution of taxes. The new spatial arrangements of the second half of the 10th century represent the final stage of the state formation process in this part of Europe. This somewhat regional, spatial integration has been considered a feature of a primary state formation process (Johnson 1980: 250). At this point secondary features of state developing can be noticed, namely intermarriage between the local ruler's families, incorporating new ideologies, gaining political recognition, etc. (cf. Gassowski 1994: 9).

CONCLUSIONS

Archaeological evidence suggests that probably in the 9th century A.D., there were very strong economic and social foundations for a state to emerge. First we can notice a shift from bimodal (tribal chiefdoms) to more complex settlement size-rank patterns. The newly emerged pattern included three categories of sites: (1) capital centers, (2) local centers, and (3) other settlements. Most of the forts from that period show a dual internal structure with a separate part for the ruler and nobility, and the other section for merchants, craftspeople, minor knights, and probably skilled captives. The economic power of the state has been built during the 9th century and the

first half of the 10th century A.D. The ruler of the Polanie tribe incorporated into his domain, and controlled, all the territories of defeated chiefs. Skilled craftspeople were settled in close proximity to the centers. This policy caused the appearance of highly specialized and productive centers. The profit gain had been used to finance his own military retainers. Old tribal chiefs were forced to pay tribute, and if they refused, probably killed. For the first time in the history of that region, the personal interests of the ruling family were identified with the state's interests and the beginning of a dynasty has been created. However, to keep the high economic level, it was necessary to provide a constant growth of labor and keep the positive balance between the growth of population and food production. Both goals could have been accomplished by invading neighboring and well-developed regions (Leciejewicz 1989: 125–126). It is interesting to notice that although similar processes can be archaeologically recorded in the other provinces of today Poland (Silesia, Malopolska, Pomerania, and Mazovia) neither one became a separate state.

Based on limited archaeological data at hand, I could distinguished the following elements of the state formation process in Western Slavia: (1) hierarchical spatial settlement arrangements representing three or more levels of rank-size distribution, and centralized ruling system – legislative, executive, and judicial, (2) internal arrangements of space within a site, suggesting social complexity in form of class alienation, and (3) centralized ideological system with monumental architecture. This process probably started in the 9th century A.D., and ended with the appearance of the first monarchies of the 11th century A.D. Central Europe.

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