

At the Origins of Inequality and Social Iniquity. The birth of the state in the ancient Near East

Edited by Franco D'Agostino

The research here proposed aims at examining one of the most complex and intriguing aspects in the whole of human history: the evidence, during the fifth millennium BCE in the Near East, and more precisely in and around the Southern Mesopotamic area, of the very first clusters of humans, comparatively significant for the density and intricacies of their communities.

At the end of the long Neolithic period, which started there around the 12th millennium BCE in the large geographic region extending from Southern Mesopotamia up to Syria, Iran and Anatolia, also including offshoots in nearby territories, man appropriated the natural environment surrounding him: animals were domesticated and plants cultivated extensively, mainly barley. This long and complex evolution, clearly shared by different peoples in different cultural and environmental settings, resulted in the capacity to feed increasingly larger numbers of individuals and, more than that, induced a power to react against natural catastrophes till then unknown in human evolution.

The beginnings of the fifth millennium BCE saw the climax of that process, when large (or even huge, as in the case of Uruk) urban agglomerations suddenly appeared. For us this is the first historical evidence of the rise of a complex and well structured organic state form, both from the social and administrative points of view: the "urban revolution" as V. G. Childe defined it. At this stage in fact, social differentiation, formerly based on parental relationships and familial associations, began to grow out of its originally private scope creating a hierarchical social system whereby function depended on the will of a central power openly identifying itself as such. Recorded archaeological evidence shows us labour differentiation and social inequality emerging more and more distinctly with time, and thence determining the birth of social iniquity.

Then some fundamental cultural processes came to a conclusion. In fact, while appropriating natural surroundings, even during the Neolithic period man had started generating a vision of reality and of the self which gradually led to building such a powerful ideological system of the world and of man's role in it as to establish the core of the subsequent cultural developments for millennia to come. At the end of that process, the extraordinary and paramount invention of writing, sprung from the need to control the sudden growth of the gigantic state mechanism, which had reached unimaginable complexity when compared with the previous eras, would give man the chance to express not just himself but also his vision of things and history. And that we owe to the people of Sumer.

Following such premises, the essays finally submitted should concern the following themes: 1. Processes of development and diffusion in the Neolithic and proto-historical periods; 2. The social and economic structure of proto-historical cities; 3. Archaeology and the evidence of inequality; 4. Visions of nature and man; 5. Protocuneiform writing and administrative management.

As aforesaid, these are just some of the possible arguments; indeed they do not exhaust the richness of the possible archaeological, historical, philological and literary aspects which the essays may consider just as well.

The abstracts along with a brief curriculum vitae should be sent by May 31st 2022 to the Editor's address: franco.dagostino@uniroma1.it. The final essays must be written in English; each single essay cannot exceed 40,000 strokes including abstract, key words, notes and bibliography (around 6,000 words) and must be sent to the Editor by March 31st 2024. Texts are expected to comply with the *Editor's Style Guidelines* (https://www.rivistacostellazioni.org/files/ugd/76cf18_7d1abe95a4b34e13a02b885c7d42e651.pdf).

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