TRADE AND CIVILISATION

ECONOMIC NETWORKS AND CULTURAL TIES, FROM PREHISTORY TO THE EARLY MODERN ERA

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INTRODUCTION

In his recent books *The Theft of History* and *The Eurasian Miracle*, Jack Goody has summarised the arguments he has made over forty years or more of writing against Eurocentric bias in world history. For what has become a familiar argument recently, Goody has maintained that throughout all the major societies of Eurasia, modern urban cultures represented a continuous development from the Bronze Age (Goody 2006: 55). The ‘big break’ for Goody was from ‘Neolithic Society,’ and he relied on Gordon Childe’s (1950) treatment of the Bronze Age as the first ‘commercial civilisations’ (identified by a trait list, i.e., urbanism, early state formation, literacy, trade and commerce, monumental architecture). Long-term world history since the Bronze Age has, therefore, been shaped by continuity, but instead of privileging an evolutionary succession from classical antiquity to feudalism and capitalism in Europe, Goody argued for the presence of competing and alternating centres of wealth accumulation and inequality throughout Eurasia (Goody 2006).

Goody’s writing is one element present in a significant literature on world history that agrees on the overcoming of eurocentrism or, as Philippe Beaujard has maintained, instead gives a crucial role to the non-European world for the history of humanity (Beaujard 2009: 7; Chakrabarty 2000). In Beaujard’s case, this is not just about providing a wider focus on Eurasia, but also Africa, the Indian Ocean and long-term interactions between continents as much
as within them, and more of a focus on oceans rather than on land masses as centres of interaction.

He shares a claim with many others, which also counters Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis, that: ‘During the greater part of the history of humanity, contacts between civilizations have been intermittent or non-existent’ (Huntington 1996: 48).

Continuity in the historical long term has also been emphasised by those taking up the theme of ‘capitalism’ or ‘globalisation’ being a feature of the last 5,000 years (e.g., Frank and Gills 1993). Queries about the nature of the social units involved and whether another ethnocentrism of the state as society has not also crept in have been made by several authors (cf. e.g., Bentley 1996), and in line with more general writings on transnationalism and transculturalism, provide a more rhizomic perspective exploring connectivity and flows of persons and things. However, the basic argument, which originated with Morgan’s writings on ancient society and Gordon Childe on the urban revolution as a distinct break associated with the rise of the Bronze Age, is more or less unquestioned (Childe 1950; Morgan 1875).

Of course, this means that areas that do not display these Bronze Age urbanised ‘civilisational’ attributes tend to get marginalised. Africa is one of these massive lacunae. It is ironic that Goody’s own anthropological specialty should be Africa, and yet his general approach is to define it as ‘other’ to the main Bronze Age civilisations of Eurasia and their long-term development. Within his schema, he attributes this historical marginality to ‘technological features’ related in Africa to the control of wealth in people rather than in landownership. This, he argues, has led to inertia in acceptance of innovations, or as in the case of the spread of iron metallurgy in Africa, development within a limited and mainly magico-religious context (Goody 2012). For Goody, Africa remains ‘firmly placed in the Neolithic, and not the Bronze Age’ (Goody 2010: 45), by which he did not mean an evolutionary stage (in the evolutionary schema advocated by Morgan and Childe), but more in Levi Strauss’s sense of the Neolithic as a strategy of material practices embedded in a ‘science of the concrete’ (based on ‘perception and imagination as against a logic removed from intuition’ (Levi-Strauss 1969: 15; 22). Goody left Africa out of the equation of global history because it did not fit a more rational political economy view of what ‘happened in history.’ As a consequence, Africa becomes an enigma; a continent without a history of urbanism, literacy, and empires, except for the tendency among some historians to exaggerate as state/urban the distributed settlements and networks of the ‘empires’ of Ghana and Mali. The danger, of course, is that any alternative idea of civilisation in Africa can be assumed to have been of a similar, if prior, socio-political form to a Bronze Age civilisation: a kind of elementary form of state or urbanism even if of a different order. Assigning ‘Africa’ to some category of the ‘prior’ is due
to the fact that there is only one intuitive single scale of evaluation, which for Africa is deficient in its gradation from ‘simple’ to ‘complex’ and from prehistory to history. If Africa is ‘stuck in the Neolithic,’ then it seems to have only a ‘prehistory’ that would of course be anathema to many. However, within the logic of a ‘science of the concrete’ described by Levi Strauss, a ‘Neolithic modernity’ might be possible if for no other reason than the opportunities it provides for thinking about alternative futures in the age of the Anthropocene (cf. Chakrabarty 2009).

Africa, of course, is not alone in not having histories of indigenous urbanism, literacy, states, and empires on which a long-term global history can be based. Much of the ‘global south’ from Oceania to the Americas has been recognised as mislabelled in this way. However, it does provide us with the opportunity to explore the possibility of an alternative pattern – not of deficiency but of ontological difference – suggesting in turn that the whole focus on Bronze Age urbanism or civilisations as the origin of modernity is quite misplaced.

THE UNITY OF AFRICA

What makes Africa, stuck in the ‘Neolithic,’ so different? The historical development of Euro-Asian ‘empires’ has done much to encourage thought on the ideal unity of empire and civilisation. The heritage of the Roman Empire remains a Western nostalgia that attempts to re-achieve unity (e.g., the ideal unity of imperium and orbis terrarium) that the Holy Roman Empire, the time of Napoleon, and the idea of a thousand years of Hitler’s Third Reich have done little to dispel either as threat or aspiration. The concept of ‘empire,’ based on the writings of the European experience, emphasises unity as achieved ideologically through the imposition of some kind of universality even though the reality of the form this might take was adapted to the historical forces that dragged them into ever-increasing differentiation. Max Weber’s description of political order based on his concept of sovereignty remains an essential issue for recognising different philosophical notions of empire as a community of shared universality. For example, after the conquests of Alexander the Great, the Stoic philosophers argued that Greek civilisation had a single mission: to create a shared oikoumene characterised by universal reason. Or, in the Roman Empire, it was believed that conquest would lead to the union of all civilised peoples witnessed in the standard architecture of the forum, found in all Roman colonial cities, symbolising the peace, order, and justice promised to all citizens (cf. Folz 1969). By idealising the achievement of universality, it was assumed that the fusion of empire with civilisation could be achieved.

Arguably, these ‘Western’ debates on empire and civilisation, and their longue durée have been positively harmful for understanding the long-term prehistory of Africa and many other parts of the ‘global south,’ and need to
be set aside. The most obvious instance of this harm is the thesis on African civilisation associated mostly with Afrocentrist writers, such as Cheikh Anta Diop (1974), who sought to fit Africa to the Eurocentric notion of civilisation by deriving Egyptian civilisation from sub-Saharan hyperdiffusionism (see MacDonald 2003 for a critical archaeological assessment). As president of a postapartheid South Africa, Thabo Mebeki’s attempt to revive the ideal of an African renaissance by redeveloping a consciousness of Africa as a unity (particularly ‘African’ diasporas) is undeniable and of considerable importance. As the following quote from his famous ‘I am an African’ speech at his inauguration in 1998 as president of South Africa shows, the ideal is that Africa once had, and will again have, a monumental civilisation.

To perpetuate their imperial domination over the people of Africa, the colonisers sought to enslave the African mind and to destroy the African soul. They sought to oblige us to accept that as Africans we had contributed nothing to human civilisation except as beasts of burden … The beginning of the rebirth of our continent must be our own rediscovery of our soul, captured and made permanently available in the great works of creativity represented by the pyramids of Egypt, the stone buildings of Axum and the ruins of Carthage and Great Zimbabwe. (Mbeki 1998: 299)

Mbeki’s call for a cultural renaissance in Africa was meant to revitalise the pan-Africanism of Senghor, Nyerere, and Nkrumah, in particular their belief that, until a sense of cultural unity and identity was established, political change in and the economic development of Africa would remain stillborn. The essence of African authenticity would be revived, they argued, only by a return to ancestral heritage to pursue the goal of economic modernity without the alienating materialism of the West.

The past would unlock the door to the future, but which past had to be very carefully selected, to fit a monumental version of civilisation that was valued in the Eurocentric tradition of social evolution.

What survives is the perception that, if Africa has a distinctive civilisation or universality, then it exists without a history of empire formation or the ideal Western fusion of imperium and orbis terrarium. Archaeologists, concerned with the development of ‘complex societies,’ have been most explicit about this connection in describing the pre-colonial African context (cf. LaViolette and Fleisher 2005; Schmidt 2009). Taking up an argument made by Carole Crumley, who questioned whether hierarchy was a necessary feature of densely populated, urban settlements (in Early Iron Age Europe), the Macintoshes excavating at Djenne Jeno in Mali, a major medieval trans-Saharan trading city in the Niger Delta, described the ‘Empire of Mali’ as heterarchical rather than hierarchical, that is a system ‘where each element in a social system is either unranked relative to other elements or possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways’ (LaViolette and Fleisher 2005: 335). The
argument that economic complexity may not be linked to political or religious hierarchies to have true ‘complex societies’ could explain why large population aggregates, such as those found in the ‘Empire of Mali,’ had no detectable political or cosmological centre. Instead, the form of settlement was a widespread of coeval units of similar form, with evidence of increasing scale and economic specialisation and a lack of obvious stratification or hierarchy. Africa is being recognised as an enigma: a continent without a history of empire formation (except for the perhaps misnamed example from medieval Mali influenced by the trans-Saharan trade cited previously) and a civilisation lacking overall political centralisation and vertical forms of transcendence.

‘NEOLITHIC’ ANCIENT AND MODERN CIVILISATIONS IN AFRICA

What kind of concept of civilisation should instead be used to understand the African (and many other) situation(s) in which there is evidence of widespread integration and conviviality over long periods, yet where the Childean coordinates of urban transcendence are lacking?

The most promising, least Eurocentric, conception of civilisation in classical sociology and anthropology was the one forged by Durkheim and Mauss (1913, 1971). Durkheim had a theory of social evolution that was singular (from mechanical to organic solidarity), and it might be expected that he would have had a singular theory of the evolution of civilisation. But his collaborator and nephew, Mauss, stressed the histories of civilisations in the plural and rejected connecting them to some hypothetical general evolution of humankind (Mauss 1929/1930: 58). Instead, they start from the largest bounded and solidary human group – political society – which thus far had been the object of Mauss and Durkheim’s sociology. However, they also acknowledged that ethnographers and cultural historians in America and Germany had established a less clear, but still distinctly social phenomenon whose spatial extent is larger than political society. Durkheim and Mauss recognised that these ‘armchair anthropologists’ – using evidence of material culture and technology, styles, language families, and types of kinship, all of which spread over time – had discovered the existence of human entities that had no clear boundaries, single social organism, or ‘culture’ in the Tyloorean or later Gordon-Childe sense, yet were linked to each other in some way that they chose to call a civilisation. The examples that Durkheim and Mauss list at one point (Durkheim and Mauss 1971: 811) include Christian civilisation, Mediterranean civilisation, and Northwest American civilisation. Because civilisations are social phenomena, they are, to Durkheim and Mauss, moral milieus. They determine a certain cast of mind and of conduct; yet, more than ‘mentalités,’ they travel and spread across social boundaries of all kinds and exist over long periods.
Durkheim and Mauss (1913, 1971) provide an indicative list of such spreading elements: myths, tales, money, commercial goods, fine arts, techniques, tools, languages, words, and scientific knowledge. Some major questions arise: Why in some cases are such things so mobile and in other cases fixed; why some travel and are borrowed, but others are not; and why some merge into and support any one particular political society. The task of ethnology and cultural history, they say in their programmatic way, is to trace these ‘civilisational spreads’ to their source and establish the direction and form of their spread and encounters with each other. The task of sociology (and anthropology) was to say how they fit together as moral, aesthetic milieus, and how they provided a cosmological unity for several distinct and sometimes diverse ‘societies’.

As Mauss defined it, a civilisation consists of ‘those social phenomena which are common to several societies.’ However, it is important to note that he then insisted that civilisations are socially linked by adding that they must be ‘more or less related to each other’ by lasting contact ‘through some permanent intermediaries, or through relationships from common descent’ (Mauss 2006: 61). On the next page, he further refined the concept of civilisation and called it ‘a family of societies’ (Mauss 2006: 62). It is clear what these permanent intermediaries are in terms of tributary, diplomatic, trading, or marital relations. In the technical terms of his and Durkheim’s sociology, a civilisation is the spread of collective representations and practices, which are the social aspect of the materials of civilisation. He says that they are ‘arbitrary,’ by which he means that they are not universal but preferred modes of making and doing things. In other civilisations, the same things are done in different ways.

In the actual order of analysis, to say these things belong together as a civilisation is to infer from archaeological and historical evidence a common set of practices and meanings, not one dominant characteristic, design, or thing, but the way in which they all hang together. Tracing their evolution over time and space implies a more ontological cosmological presence. As Durkheim and Mauss state, ‘It even happens quite frequently that one phenomenon implies the others. And reveal their existence … To these systems of facts, with their unity and their specific mode of existence. A special name should be given; the most appropriate seems to be that of ‘civilisation’ (Mauss 2006: 37).

By following the Durkheim and Mauss perspective, scholars can analytically study phenomena that have a definite existence in terms of their ontological politics without the Western bias of assuming the primacy of literacy, urbanism, and monumental architecture. Ironically of course, this approach follows what was forced upon UNESCO, which had to temper its own bias towards monumental tangible heritage as the basis for being inscribed on a World Heritage list by introducing the 2003 convention on intangible cultural heritage that stressed knowledge and performance as the basis for awarding heritage value.
Because the argument for a Maussian perspective on civilisation needs to be specified in more empirical terms, we will continue in a Jack-Goody-inspired way and concentrate on the everyday material life of cuisine and the implications this has for perceptions of the body that, arguably, is distinctly African. A comparison across the Eurasian landmass to Africa – in terms of the beginning of food domestication – shows some clear style patterns and boundaries in cuisine (Figures 7.1 and 7.2). There are two areas in north-central Sahara and northeastern Asia (China and Japan) where pottery develops as part of a boiling or steaming cooking regime to produce soft paste foods from wild millets or sorghum (in African), and rice in parts of East Asia (Figure 7.3). The development of a boiling and grinding food technology is based on wild grains, and originates as part of an indigenous epi-Palaeolithic indigenous hunter-gatherer regime from the tenth to ninth millennia BC in the northern savannas/Sahel, whilst domesticated plants spread into these parts of Africa only by the fourth millennium BC or later. Plausibly distinct was a tropical cooking complex based on yams and other tubers and tree nuts in the tropical forest zones of western Africa – a zone of origin inferred biogeographically but not yet evident archaeologically (Fuller and Hildebrand 2013), but nevertheless indicated in historical linguistics as preceding the advent of millets in this region (see, e.g., Bostoen 2014). African food systems, based on wet foods, can be seen in terms of two broad traditions, the boiling of grains into porridge and fermentation to beers (also discussed by Haaland 2006), and a forest tradition focused on tuber pastes and fermented flours. The grain-porridge tradition can
7.2. The geography of three important early cooking and ritual spreads in the Old World, including (1) cereal domestication zones in the Sahel-Saharan boiling zones and the later Bantoid/Bantu spread of porridge traditions (as per Ricquier and Boesten 2011); (2) the early West Eurasian spread of ovens, breading making, wheat, and associated sacrifice traditions; (3) the eastern Eurasian spread of ceramics for boiling/steaming of whole grains and associated ancestral cult and feasting traditions (image by DQF).

7.3. A map summarising the early zones of rice and millet agriculture in Asia, overlaid with key frontiers of food preferences, including the frontier between dairy production and nonmilking (after Simoons 1970), and the zone cultivation sticky (waxy) forms of cereals including rice and millets. Also indicated are some of the proposed epicentres for the origins of sticky Panicum miliaceum (blue star), sticky Setaria italica (three origins indicated by Roman numerals), and rice (concentric circles). Based on Rowlands and Fuller 2009.
be inferred to relate to early ceramics throughout the southern Sahara from west to east by 8,000–9,000 years ago, with establishment of cultivation-based food production in this tradition by about 5,000 years ago in both the far west (with domestication of pearl millet: see Manning and Fuller 2014) and in the eastern Sudan (with sorghum, see Fuller 2014). In sub-Saharan West Africa, this millet-porridge tradition merged with the forest tuber paste traditions prior to the Bantu expansion, that is by about 3,000 years ago, as indicated by a rich Bantu vocabulary to do with porridge and stiff porridges, as well as shared yam terminologies (Riquer and Bostoen 2011). As Haaland has shown, this pattern spreads throughout Eastern and Southern Africa with the Bantu migrations but does not extend further north than a boundary roughly along the frontier between Nubia and the Upper Nile Valley (Figure 7.4; Haaland 2006). Instead, by the same period, there is a marked contrast between the sub-Saharan pattern of porridges and beer and the roasting and baking food systems of North Africa extending throughout the Mediterranean and through the Middle East to Northwest India and Central Asia with a central focus on the oven for baking and the roasting of meat associated with sacrifice (Figure 7.2; Fuller and Rowlands 2011).
What the archaeological and ethnographical patterns indicate is that there have been long-term stable cultural boundaries in the everyday materiality of cuisine extending over millennia in which the cultural technologies of food systems are part of much larger material cosmologies. For example, in East and Southeast Asia, techniques of boiling and steaming are crucial for the use of bamboos and rattans in house building/basketry and all forms of containers and serving of foods (Figure 7.5). This relates to the observations of Adams (1977) that fermentation (which comes after boiling) is a recurrent style of processing, not just food, but materials for craft and even the dead in some Southeast Asian traditions. We have previously outlined how Chinese systems of kinship and ancestry veneration were mediated by shared foods, simmered wine, and an understanding of substances that passed between the generations and shared in commensal groups, with elements of this evident in practices from the Neolithic funerals through to modern practices (Fuller and Rowlands 2011; Rowlands and Fuller 2009). In Africa, distinction in food types and cooking technologies are embedded in linguistic distinctions in all the Bantu and semi-Bantu languages (Nyamnjoh and Rowlands 2013). Most African languages and all the Bantu ones make a lexical distinction between different types of eating. In particular, distinctions are made between the swallowing of soft, ground food and eating that involves chewing or tearing food. In Mankon and the ‘Ngemba speaking’ (Western Bantu borderland) region of the Grassfields in Cameroon, for example, the two words are dzie...
and *kfuru*. The emotional connotations are quite different. *Dzie* is ‘good eating’ and focuses on ground millet or, now, more likely corn or yams, taro, or cassava ground into a paste that, with a palm oil sauce, is nourishing and unifying. It implies a sense of well-being gained from sharing and eating food together, good words being said, and occurs at events promoting social harmony and the resolution of conflict. The successor to the title of a dead elder, for instance, is described, at his installation as one who ‘eats the house’ (*dzie nda*), that is restores its unity. *Kefuru*, on the contrary, is perceived as potentially harmful and dangerous: The focus is on the teeth and the act of tearing apart, for instance, when people eat meat, or show their teeth during acts of extravagant consumption. A commensality of bad nocturnal cannibalism is opposed to the good diurnal commensality and the sharing of ground, soft, mixed vegetable food that can be swallowed in a lump (Nyamnjoh and Rowlands 2013). *Kfuru* is widely associated with witchcraft where the emphasis is on the destructive consumption of the lives of others, usually often referred to by witches metaphorically as ‘goats’ or ‘fowls.’ The act of ingesting or swallowing food in much of Africa is, therefore, certainly more complicated than it might seem. In most African languages, there are distinctions made between two types of eating, two types of masticating and swallowing food, and two images (at least) of the parts of the body involved. There are also several different ideas of personhood and moral agency involved. As a civilisational cosmology, we suggest that all of this can be traced back to the Paleolithic as the origins of a basic template to which transformations and additions of plants, tree products, and domesticated animals have been creatively incorporated.

**LONG-TERM FLOWS AND CONNnectivities**

In his perspective on civilisation, Mauss (2006) stressed the need to retain diffusionist ideas of cultural spread and innovation. He argued that this would force us to analyse *mixtures*, but not in the ways that cultural diffusionists of the time distinguished the contiguity of cultures. Instead, he emphasised the spread of civilisations and how they encounter each other.

The history of civilisation, from the point of view that concerns us, is the history of the circulation between societies of the various goods and achievements of each … Societies live by borrowing from each other, but they define themselves rather by the refusal of borrowing than by its acceptance. (Mauss 2006: 44)

In this regard the early long-distance flows of cultural materials are important, such as those across the Indian Ocean between Africa and Asia. The connections between Africa and India took place around the end of the third millennium BC, connecting across the northwestern part of the Indian
Ocean through the integration of hitherto separate trading systems of the Persian-Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea Gulf of Aden (Boivin and Fuller 2009; Fuller et al. 2011: 545). Trade in obsidian connects northern Ethiopian and Yemen by the sixth millennium BC (Khalidi 2009), and expanded through time to include export for southern Red Sea obsidian into Egypt by the fourth millennium BC (Zairns 1990). Such trade is argued to lay the foundation for and to provide a more durable marker for trade in incense, that is myrrh and frankincense, that was sourced in the southern Red Sea lands, but central to royal temple cults in Egypt since the Predynastic period (Boivin and Fuller 2009). At about the same time, from the sixth millennium BC, Mesopotamian Ubaid ceramics and bitumen beads found on sites in eastern Arabia highlight the operation of Persian Gulf seafaring (Carter 2006), which ultimately underpinned the later third millennium BC trade between Mesopotamian cities and those of the Indus Valley (Boivin and Fuller 2009). From about 2,000 BC, these two maritime exchange zones seem to become linked, east and west around the southern coasts of Arabia. This provides the route for the spread of several major crops of African origins (sorghum, pearl millet, hyacinth bean) to the drier regions of western and central India (Figure 7.6; cf. Boivin and Fuller 2009; Fuller and Boivin 2009). Millets originating as domesticates in the Sahel region of West Africa were transmitted west to east along the Sahelian corridors by the end of the third millennium BC (Figure 7.7). They became
available on the northeastern African coasts and were taken as food by the fishing and sailing crews of the boats plying a coastal trade to the Red Sea, Gujarat, and the coast of Western India. The connections from West Africa to India by the early second millennium BC were, therefore, already established many centuries before this time (Figure 7.5).

However, these movements of goods took place through an extended Gulf-India exchange network of small-scale societies. ‘This transfer took place primarily between north-east Africa and/or Yemen and western India, probably outside of the context of the Bronze Age trade between major civilisations’ (Fuller et al. 2011: 547). What is also clear is that the aim of the trade and movements of people, boats, and goods were not about accessing food and calories per se. The recipient societies in western India had well-established indigenous millet agriculture and African species would not become major staples for a millennium or two (Boivin et al. 2014; Cooke and Fuller 2015).

Instead it is likely that these early networks moved high-value substances, such as incenses and medicinal plants. Some grains may have simply been leftover

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7.7. A distribution map of archaeological finds of pearl millet through African (after Manning et al. 2011), with lines and arrows indicating stages and directions of dispersal. Marginal annotation indicates key landmarks in the dispersal process.
food after such voyages, but it is also plausible that foodstuffs were moved for perceived medicinal or apotropaic properties, much as rice in the Roman world or early Medieval Europe was perceived to be a medicinal food for the sick rather than a staple food (Decker 2009). Indeed, grains moved long distances may have at first been valued as exotics only later shifting into the category of potentially staples after they had been adopted into local cultivation and culinary systems (Boivin et al. 2012, 2014). By virtue of their movement over long distances they may well have gained a perception of power in the exotic.

Therefore, trade on which these movements of plants was based lay in distributing ritual substances that later became more well known in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia as vital substances to service the deities at the ritual banquets of city gods and the staff of the temples or palaces of Bronze Age urban centres. The creation of an Arabian Sea corridor between Africa and India was, therefore, very likely stimulated by the demand for incense (in particular, frankincense and myrrh) and was the precursor of the later pepper route of the spice trade.

As Boivin and Fuller summarise the situation, the first signs of the spread of pepper that originate in the wet forests of southern India come from the finding of black pepper corns used to fragrance the mummy of pharaoh Ramesses II (ca. 1200 BC). At first, the links between Africa, the Gulf, and India are limited to the Arabian Sea, but in the next millennia, systematic links are made across the Indian Ocean. This is clear in the later first millennium CE when Swahili culture in southeastern Africa begins to incorporate tropical Asian crops (Boivin et al. 2014). But it may start earlier with postulated Southeast Asian starchy cultivars that were brought to the moist tropical zones of central and West Africa (i.e., bananas, plantains, taro, and large yam complex) (Figure 7.8). Roger Blench has also argued recently that the spread of banana/plantain, taro, and yam complex from New Guinea into Southeast Asia and a return spread of bamboos and rattans into island Melanesia occurs before the spread of domesticated rice and the Austro-Polynesian expansion associated with the Lapita horizon (Blench 2009, 2010; Blench pers. com.).

In a world systems perspective, these interactions and ‘trade routes’ between Africa, the Gulf Region, and India by the end of the third or early second millennium BC would be seen as either periphery or semiperiphery to the urban centres of Mesopotamia and Egypt. But this would be the wrong perspective. There is increasing evidence of the independence of these networks. Their origin does not require any prior involvement in trade with the urban Bronze Age centres of Southern Mesopotamia (Figure 7.9). As Boivin and Fuller (2009) argue, there were attempts to intervene and control these sources of vital ritual substances, like Queen Hatshepsut’s expedition to the land of Punt and military expeditions from some of the Southern Mesopotamian city-states, which replicated the expansion to control trade routes to Northern Syria and Anatolia. In other words, although obviously different in scale, such
7.8. Example of major long-distance crop translocations in the ancient Old World, and including terrestrial and Indian Ocean routes (modified map elements from Boivin et al. 2012 and Fuller and Boivin 2009).

7.9. Early Bronze Age trading spheres (third millennium BC), indicating the well-studied trade between urban state zone cores such as Egypt, Mesopotamia, Indus (after Boivin and Fuller 2009), as well as some other trading spheres with peripheries with emergent urban polities and nonurban, mobile societies of substance exchanges, notably in the Arabian Sea and via the hilly interior of Middle Asia.
attempts were rather like later secularised Portuguese, Dutch, English, or French interventions in the Indian Ocean trade, all of which had to use force to break into already established and historically well-developed, Arab-dominated trading networks. It requires another perspective to know exactly how what appears to be long-distance exchanges between small-scale agro-pastoral societies in the African Sahel linked to fishing/seafaring communities on the Arabian Sea coasts and hunter-gatherer communities on the West Indian coasts would encourage commitment to long-distance movements and transport of probably highly valued ritual and exotic substances and their preservation outside of any complex urban-based mercantile systems. In other words, the Africa-India and Southeast Asia corridors – including both earlier coastal and, later, direct trans-Indian Ocean routes that brought the island Southeast Asian products (plantains, bananas, taro, and chickens) and Austronesian speakers to the East African coast and Madagascar – were ‘Neolithic’ and self-contained rather than a peripheral product of Bronze Age urban systems.

If the Africa to Indian Ocean pattern in the third to second millennia is considered in a wider Eurasian context, it can be seen that autonomous development is not unique but within a ‘Bronze Age’ milieu. The Central Asian Steppes extending to the Caucasus in the Early Bronze Age have now been reinterpreted in terms of autonomous development of bronze metalworking, the domesticated horse, and wheeled transport in the form of chariots in particular (Anthony 2007). The question of the relations between Central Asia and Mesopotamia and China is explored in terms of the transmission of pastoralism, metallurgy, and the development of the Silk Road (Frachetti 2012; Figure 7.10). However, this connection suggests a different situation to that found for sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian Ocean, due to the fact that their autonomous development is linked to commercial trading systems, while their autonomy becomes a problem leading to reorganisation of trade in these ‘core regions’ and later to the pattern of violence to intervene and control, leading to the formation of later empires.

Thus, the questions remain: What is different about these zones that in terms of flows and connectivity by the mid-first millennium BC show common linkages in transfers of food items, spices, and ritual substances, and yet in their nonurban, civilisational status have been relegated to the periphery in global histories? What is different in their being ‘stuck in the Neolithic,’ and what drives the movement of people and things in the absence of a clear mercantile abstract logic of profit-oriented trade?

EXPANSION AND RITUAL INTEGRATION

From the perspective of the temple economies of Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, the ‘south’ – meaning broadly Yemen, Oman, and the Somali
coast — was the source of important tree resins, in particular frankincense and myrrh, derived from trees growing in the Horn of Africa and South Arabia. As incense, these resins were used as part of sacrificial offerings to deities in temple rituals that originated as part of roasting and baking traditions in the Neolithic societies (if not earlier) of west Eurasia from the Indus to the Mediterranean. Oils, perfumes, and incense were combined with the roasting of meat as sacrificial foods made for deities (Fuller and Rowlands 2011). In their discussion of ancient Greek sacrifice, Vernant and Detienne emphasised the role of pouring incense and oils on roasted meat to produce the odors and smoke that would attract the attention of transcendent deities (Detienne and Vernant 1989). Offerings of myrrh, frankincense, and possibly obsidian for hair removal were critical components in Ancient Egyptian funeral rituals both for the preservation of the dead and in the transmission of the spirit of the dead to an afterlife (Wengrow 2006: 147). As has been seen, the supply of pepper from South India to Egypt, witnessed in the funerary rite of Ramesses II, is already part of this ritual exchange by 1200 BC, and the early trade of copal from the East African Coast to Western Asia is suggested by the identification of it as a substance on a pendant in a third millennium BC Mesopotamian grave from Eshnunna (Tel Asmar near modern Baghdad). Although this early date may need to be viewed with some caution, a pre-Islamic trade in copal from East Africa to the Middle East is more certain (Crowther et al. 2015). In fact, the idea of ritual substances from the periphery as a key feature in the nature of Bronze Age value has long been emphasised with the circulation of...
amber from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, and presumably many parts of the Middle East as well as Egypt. As Kristiansen notes, amber was craved in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Bronze Age; however, little is known about how or why it was used except perhaps in connection with healing or curing or talismanic protection (Kristiansen and Suchowska-Ducka 2015: 362). What all these substances share in common is a lack of use in their areas of origin. In the case of Baltic amber, whilst it was found in late Neolithic graves in Scandinavia, it disappears from graves during the Nordic Bronze Age (Ling and Rowlands 2013). Further afield, incense, coming from Southeast Asia, wafted through the T’ang Emperor’s court. Before opening the business of the court, a ‘table of aromatics’ would be placed before the Son of Heaven and here ‘the great councillors of state stood before the table and, perfused with the magical fragrance, proceeded to conduct the business of state’ (Schafer 1963: 155–156 quoted in Sahlins 2008: 191). Such dependence on aromatics for the efficacy of Bronze Age state rituals, indicated that this access to the unguents, spices, and oils from the ‘south’ was important, as these were more than ‘luxuries’ or exotica, nor were they easily substituted by alternative substances from regions more controllable through commerce and violence. In other words, whilst a good case has been made recently for the embedding of trade for profit as part of the temple economies of western Eurasia, it is the exclusion of Africa and its connections with Southern India to Island South East Asia, quite separate from the profit-making logic of these Bronze Age trade networks, that should be emphasised (e.g., Boivin and Fuller 2009). The absence of seals, common weight systems, and standard measures in Southern India indicates this region was removed from direct contact and influences of the Indus civilisation, which in turn suggests that the value attributed to these ‘southern’ substances was not a matter of quantitative assessment or the integrity of the contents of trade packages, but a more Appadurai-like form of exchange value (Appadurai 1985). A ‘Neolithic’ value of ritual integrity preserving the authenticity of substances, in turn, seems to have depended on maintaining a certain ‘mystery’ about their origins. It is quite striking that the idea of remoteness and distance as a ritual value would be supported by the mysteries of exchange (e.g., as emphasised by Mary Helms 1988). Such ‘mystery’ in the origins of sanctity would also be antithetical to attempts to intervene and control by force the source of life-giving substances, at least until the violent expansion of European colonising powers appeared on the scene. A contrast is drawn between this and a commercial logic of branding, profit, and accumulation in Bronze Age contexts (Wengrow 2008) as a precedent creating the necessary conditions for expansion through violence leading to early states and empires (Wengrow 2010). A ‘Neolithic logic,’ in the sense of Levi Strauss’s ‘science of the concrete,’ is in fact based on quite opposite cosmo-politics, and simply dissolves and disappears in the face of extreme violence. Bronze Age reproduction of state power based on
unequal exchange, enforcement of property rights, and support by violence, depended not simply on ignoring the world of the ‘south,’ but on sustaining and preserving its Neolithic value to ensure the independence of their means of ritual reproduction.

In his materialist critique of Levi-Strauss, Jack Goody gives us another part of the answer for the uniqueness of Africa. He has consistently compared the kinship and marriage patterns of Eurasia as based on endogamy rules, in contrast to exogamy rules in Africa (Goody 1983). In fact, this dichotomy is not so clear cut, and he has been criticised (see, e.g., Hann 2008; Yanagisako 1979). However, the broad difference he wants to make links marriage and inheritance throughout Eurasia, in particular, to the control of scarce property and ownership of land.

To keep control of limited resources, in particular land, kin groups in Eurasia, he argues, frequently pass on property through both sexes, a practice (basically a dowry system) that Goody called ‘divergent devolution.’ In Africa, by contrast, where land historically was plentiful, it was control over people and their reproductive potential that was always more important. Low population densities, for Goody, meant there was no need for the control of labour on land creating the means of inequality. By contrast, he emphasised that African kinship systems focused on the transmission of rights in people and, in particular, their offspring, while Crow/Omaha kinship was directed to alternative generational exogamous marriage ties preventing taking a wife from the same group as the mother (Rowlands 1980). In a world where land was not bounded into estates, and elaborate bureaucracies and complex divisions of labour were not developed, people could be mobile and adopt different forms and manifest themselves differently according to context and necessity. Certainly, the concern with how best to conceive subjects, objects, and the relationship between them has been very much at the surface of the ethnographic imagery that the study of sub-Saharan societies has generated: lineages and ancestor cults; secret male fraternities and their masquerades; drums of affliction; fetishes and blacksmiths; witchcraft substances; wealth in people; and admixtures of subjects and objects in things like drums, masks, beaded crowns, and raffia cloths.

A ‘Bronze Age’ gaze that insists on the universalism of a particular formation of personhood is contradicted by the presence of a ‘logic of the concrete.’ In more animistic settings, it is objects that realise their innate subjectivity in ritual practice rather than merely representing an externally derived subjectivity. The fact that such dramas of the object were still potent in the Bronze Age ritual of the person – including the ideals of warrior success and animism, as in the widely recognised ritual power of swords and protective armour – suggest that no great drama of rupture took place between Neolithic and Bronze Age cosmologies in Eurasia. It would be best not to insist on rupture but rather to
inquire into the longevity of Neolithic ideals well into the Bronze Age and later, potentially, to the present.

CONCLUSION

Our main aim in the chapter has been to complexify the nature of global histories that draw upon the idioms of Bronze Age civilisation and urbanism. Clearly, the scale involved with states and empires is significant, but perhaps it is worth pointing to the fact that, like industrialisation in Europe, urban civilisation from the Bronze Age may have developed as a contingency to some other concerns that were elsewhere and involved none of these attributes precisely because ‘elsewhere’ they had better control of nurturing the conditions of life.

Instead, using Mauss’s development of a concept of civilisation has a more transcendent value, as it encompasses and exists prior to the generation of what sociologically may be described as societies or states. When applied to the pre-history of much of sub-Saharan Africa and connections to the larger Indian Ocean world, not only a larger civilisational cosmology can be identified but also practices that maintain quite distinct ontological politics from the Bronze Age and its subsequent legacies in terms of states and empires.

If we move our gaze forward to a more contemporary setting, being ‘stuck in the Neolithic’ may well be the basis for understanding the contemporary realities not only of Africa, but many other parts of the ‘south.’ Whilst colonial rule imposed forms of governance and authority consistent with the nature of the state developed in the West, it by no means guaranteed that these are the forms of ‘governance’ that will eventually re-emerge based on what many pan-Africanist leaders at different times of independence in Africa have believed would be the rediscovery of more authentic African ways of exercising power and legitimacy. Such indigenous forms of knowledge may well be what will be valued in any future resolution of the contradictions of living in the age of the ‘Anthropocene’/‘Capitalocene.’

REFERENCES


