

Abstract

The emergence of the state is commonly explained by the availability of food surplus that resulted from the Neolithic Revolution. We argue that this explanation is flawed, since population would have adjusted to prevent any surplus. In contrast, we suggest that what led to the emergence of the state was a transformation of the tax technology (the ability to appropriate), that was induced by the transparency of the new farming technology. Our theory, linking between the transparency of production, the appropriation technology and the state, is applied here also to explain key features that distinguished ancient Egypt from ancient Mesopotamia and in particular land tenure institutions.