CHAPTER ONE

THE SECRET

This book is about secret societies: their dynamics, their *raisons d'être*, their characteristics according to ethnographic accounts, and their importance for understanding changes in the archaeological record. Secret societies embodied some of the most awe-inspiring events in the cultural repertories of traditional societies. They brought to earth masked spirits who performed supernatural feats and exerted exceptional influences on the living. Those in high positions claimed to hold the secrets of the universe and of life, to be able to control spirits, confer wealth, bring the dead back to life, exorcise the possessed, and perform supernatural feats. Secret societies often built elaborate special structures. These organizations may have been precursors of both stage magic shows and institutionalized religions, and they may have played critical roles in the foundation of complex political organizations.

By firelight, terrifying spirits could appear together with cannibals and supernatural destroyers. Primordial forces, unlike anything seen in normal life, were invoked, unleashed, and reined in again. Secret societies had mystery, pomp, impressive displays, and above all, claims to secret supernatural power. Adepts ate burning coals or spewed them out of their mouths as fountains of fire. The initiated appeared out of smoke or fell from the skies; they menaced the uninitiated who were forced to hide or flee. Behind the staged dramas, there were often real and macabre displays of ruthless power including human sacrifices. Trespassers on to the grounds of secret societies were killed or, if they were lucky, got off with a beating.

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Reading the early ethnographic descriptions is not always for the faint of heart. The accounts may captivate readers owing to their incredible descriptions, but the images evoked can perturb sensitive dispositions and invade dreams. Secret society members did not shirk from using any tactics they could to impress and intimidate their fellow villagers, no matter how gruesome. Memberships in the most important societies came at high costs not only in terms of material property, but in physical and emotional terms as well. In addition to harrowing physical ordeals, total commitment to the societies was demanded. To prove such commitment, candidates in some societies had to make their wives available for sex with leaders of the society or even give their wives away, or they had to provide human sacrifices, engage in cannibalism, or even eat their own sons. To enter into the world of secret societies is to enter a world of mystery, magic, mortification, smoke and mirrors imbued with supernatural and real power. At times, comparisons with the "dark side" of the Force in *Star Wars* might not be too farfetched.

Perhaps because of these features, secret societies have fascinated amateur and professional researchers of politics and religion for well over a century, and the accounts are still captivating. As early as the 1840s, Paul Kane (1996:146,151) recorded a *Hamatsa* ceremony and used the term "secret society" to refer to exclusive ritual organizations on America's Northwest Coast with costly initiations. Considerable anthropological attention was subsequently devoted to secret societies from 1890 to 1940, although much less interest has been displayed by academicians since then. Members were usually sworn to keep the secrets of their society's power on pain of death. Secret societies occurred in tribal and chiefly societies and, in some cases, persisted into modern industrial societies. Anthropological luminaries such as Franz Boas and Philip Drucker have written extensively on secret societies, while innumerable books have been written about contemporary secret societies such as the Freemasons.

There are occasional excavation reports that have identified "dance houses" or "suditories" in California, and there have been many excavations of kivas in the Southwest. However, even in these areas, treatments generally stop at the description and identification of ritual structures (with notable exceptions by Gamble 2008, Weeks 2009, 2012, Ware 2014, and Dye 2016). In most other areas, secret societies have been ignored altogether (again with some notable exceptions by Whitehouse 1992, Mills 2014, and Dietrich and Notroff 2015). Whitehouse, in particular, was a pioneer in promoting the existence of secret societies in prehistoric cultures, especially Neolithic caves.

In archaeology, it has become fashionable to invoke the vague power of ritual and beliefs in attempts to explain cultural changes of the past, especially where impressive ritual structures appeared (Pauketat and Emerson 1997; Cauvin 2000; Whalen and Minnis 2001; Emerson et al. 2003:308; Parker Pearson et al.

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2006:234–5; Parker Pearson 2007:142; Watkins 2010; Hodder 2010a:340, 348, 353; Whitehouse and Hodder 2010:142; Joyce and Barber 2015:835). However, the precise way in which rituals could create religious or political power has remained nebulous. At most, the existing explanations simply attribute major religious constructions to the power of beliefs and rituals without anchoring explanations in more tangible facets of culture. Alternatively, explanations have appealed to various social stresses that rituals purportedly helped alleviate. In contrast, secret societies have the potential of linking ideologies and rituals to the acquisition of power and particularly to explain why religion or ritual has played such an important role in the emergence of more and more complex societies leading up to civilization.

As yet, the potential importance of secret societies has gone largely unrecognized in archaeological theoretical worlds. Where there have been attempts to identify and situate secret societies, or "religious sodalities," in broader cultural dynamics, as in the American Southwest, the architectural remains have generally been interpreted in functional terms, especially as a ritual means for reducing social tensions and binding amalgamated kinship groups together in the same community (notable exceptions include Gamble 2008, and Ware 2014). This functionalist interpretation is in stark contrast to the ethnographic accounts of secret societies which the following chapters illustrate.

In Europe and Asia, the very concept of a secret society seems to be unknown or not well understood among archaeologists. The recent weighty tome on the prehistory of religion from Oxford University Press (Insoll 2011) does not even have an index entry for secret societies or ritual sodalities, and there is no discussion devoted to them other than two very brief passages. This lack of attention by archaeologists is curious since the anthropological literature describes secret societies as playing prominent roles in community dynamics. Given the widespread ethnographic occurrence of secret societies in tribal societies, it would indeed be surprising if secret societies did not play important roles in many prehistoric cultures throughout the world. The goal of this book is to help rescue secret societies from this state of oblivion in archaeology and to demonstrate that they likely played pivotal roles in sociopolitical and religious developments in the past. I am convinced that they constitute a sort of "missing link" in the cultural evolution of more complex societies.

I have been investigating secret societies for more than twenty-five years and have concluded that they provide a critical link in our understanding of how individuals augmented their power in many communities and regions. I first became alerted to the potential importance of secret societies when D'Ann Owens undertook a study for me of the ritual contexts of children's handprints and footprints in the Upper Paleolithic painted caves of France. In order to understand what those rituals may have been like, she examined

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the ethnographies of complex hunter/gatherers to see what kinds of rituals children were involved in. Owens concluded that the most likely context for children's participation in rituals was secret societies (Owens and Hayden 1997).

On the basis of that study, I realized that secret societies not only could be potentially identified in the archaeological remains of complex hunter/gatherer and tribal cultures, but that secret societies were often the most powerful organizations in those societies. Moreover, the power they wielded cross-cut kinship and even community boundaries. Serendipitously, in my own excavations at the Keatley Creek site on the Canadian Plateau, there were several puzzling small structures about 100–200 meters from the core of that large prehistoric village of complex hunter/gatherers. I initially thought that these small outlying structures might be dwellings of outcasts, migrants, specialized hunters, possibly shamans, or women's menstrual houses. However, after Owens' study, and given the very secluded nature of the structures on the outskirts of the residential area at Keatley Creek, together with the ethnographically documented existence of secret societies during the nineteenth century in the locality, it occurred to me that these might be specialized ritual structures used by secret societies. Subsequent investigations of those structures have largely confirmed this interpretation (Hayden 1998; Hayden and Adams 2004; Sheppard 2007; Morin 2010; Villeneuve 2012), a topic that will be discussed further in Chapter 10.

Given these developments, together with my ongoing interest in aggrandizer strategies for promoting aggrandizers' own self-interests (Hayden 2001, 2014), I was keen to find out more about the underlying nature of secret societies, and was fortunate to have Suzanne Villeneuve take up the research program dealing with the small peripheral structures at Keatley Creek. She became intrigued by the issues involved and has vigorously pursued additional research projects related to the possibilities and problems surrounding these structures. The following chapters owe a great debt to the early ethnographies, and I hope that many readers will find the resulting observations and thoughts as exciting as I do. Thus, I would like to begin with some discussion of why secret societies are important for archaeologists and exactly what a secret society is.

WHY ARE SECRET SOCIETIES IMPORTANT?

The preceding comments provide a general background for understanding why archaeologists and anthropologists should be interested in secret societies. More specifically, these reasons can be enumerated as follows.

First, secret societies are recognized in their own communities as being important and powerful, often embodying the most elaborate traditions of their cultures in terms of ritual, art, music, food, dance, costumes, and language – all

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aspects that make individual social groups unique and contribute to their cultural identities.

Second, secret societies only appear to emerge among transegalitarian (complex) hunter/gatherers and subsequent agricultural tribal or chiefdom societies (Driver 1969:349,360,365,396; Owens and Hayden 1997; Johansen 2004). As such, they constitute a relatively recent phenomenon in cultural evolution, likely extending back only to the Upper Paleolithic, or in exceptional circumstances perhaps back to the Middle Paleolithic.

Third, because the most powerful members of communities generally dominate the highest ranks of secret societies, and because they control significant resources and means to advance their own hegemonic control in the community, secret societies constitute powerful driving forces for cultural changes including major changes in ideologies, cultural values, and beliefs, as well as new sociopolitical relationships including an increased centralization of power.

Fourth, secret societies generally include members from different kinship groups and even communities, thus establishing a supra-kinship and supra-community level of organization, control, and power with a far wider demographic and economic base than otherwise might have existed. Secret societies, therefore, could have served ambitious individuals as the means for establishing community and regional political organizations with centralized control. Ware (2014:114,194) emphasizes that ritual sodalities in the American Southwest were regional organizations that often encompassed different linguistic and ethnic groups. Other ethnographers have explicitly linked the development of secret societies to the limitations of kinship systems for developing political control (e.g., Chapters 2 and 7). Such regional organization also characterized the American Northwest Coast, the Great Plains, the Great Lakes, California, Africa, and Melanesia. Thus, secret societies have a strong tendency to form far-reaching regional networks or interaction spheres.

Fifth, secret societies are important because they constitute a major means for extracting surplus resources and wealth from community members and for concentrating these surpluses in the hands of a few individuals. Moreover, they only appear to have occurred in areas capable of producing significant surpluses. Both the carrot and the stick were often employed, with rewards for those who contributed and intimidation or coercion used for those who were reluctant contributors. Supernatural justifications for these levies and physical means of enforcing requisitions typified many secret societies.

Sixth, secret societies may have led to the development of some of the most notable prehistoric ritual centers and ultimately to the formation of regional state religions. Archaeologists have long been aware that religious institutions seem to have played key roles in the emergence of political complexity, from the first "communal buildings" or shrines of the Neolithic, or even the Epipaleolithic, to the dominating temple or mortuary mounds or megaliths

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of early chiefdoms, to the impressive ziggurats and pyramids of the first states. The scale of investment and the artistic efforts devoted to religious institutions dwarf any other undertaking in these polities that archaeologists have detected. Yet, for a long time, attempting to deal with religion was considered a hopeless task by many archaeologists, as exemplified by Hawkes' (1954) dictum that religion and ideology are the least accessible, if not totally inaccessible, aspects of prehistory. Similarly, in an interview in *The Mystery of Stonehenge*, Atkinson stated that when archaeologists reach for past people's minds, they slip through your fingers like sand (CBS 1965). As a result, for a long time, the reason why religion was so central to the emergence of political complexity was viewed in terms of religious fanaticism or other mysterious factors. It has only been recently that ethnographers, ethnoarchaeologists, and archaeologists have begun to investigate the link between politics and religion (Aldenderfer 1998:304–5; 2010; Dietler 2001:70; B. Hayden 2003; Whitley and Hays-Gilpin 2008). I argue that it is no happenstance that chiefs and early kings played prominent roles in rituals and feasts. Because of the political roles that secret society members played within – and between – communities, secret societies appear to have considerable potential for understanding why ritual and religion were such central elements in the early development of political systems. It can be argued that secret societies were the first institutionalized manifestation of ritual organizations linked to political power, and that this was, in fact, the explicit goal of secret societies. Therefore, the political dimension of secret societies may be critical to understanding the evolution of political systems.

Seventh, secret societies play important roles in lower or middle range archaeological theory. They are eminently visible archaeologically, especially where caves or specialized structures were used. They had ideological characteristics which help to explain the changes in iconography that characterize key periods in the archaeological record in certain areas, such as the European and Near Eastern Neolithic, and even the Upper Paleolithic. And the existence of secret societies helps explain unusual features of the archaeological record such as the use of deep caves, therianthropic images, human sacrifices, and cannibalism.

Thus, there are a variety of important reasons why archaeologists should be interested in secret societies. It should be emphasized, however, that no claims are being made for the universal occurrence of secret societies in the development of complex societies, especially since alternative organizational frameworks could serve similar functions of extending political control beyond kin groups. Alternatives to secret societies could have included: saroans (large-scale work exchange groups), hunting societies, feasting societies, military and marital alliances, age grades, village administrations, extending kin networks to clan–phratry–moity dimensions, pilgrimage organizations, other types of sodalities, and spirit quests. Nevertheless, secret societies appear to have been relatively common at the transegalitarian and chiefdom levels, and they were

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powerful tools for promoting the self-interests of ambitious individuals, especially in terms of political control.

The main emphasis in the opening chapters of this book will be on complex hunter/gatherers since they represent the first clearly recognizable step in this trajectory, long before agriculture was introduced. If we are to understand the reasons why secret societies formed, the contexts that they emerged in, and their impacts on existing social or political frameworks, it will be critical to examine complex hunter/gatherer societies. But first, it will be useful to obtain a few more insights into the nature and the character of secret societies.

WHAT IS THE SECRET?

One misconception needs to be addressed from the outset. The term "secret society" instills visions of clandestine meetings by people whose memberships and activities are carefully concealed from public scrutiny. In fact, this is not what is secret in secret societies. Instead of a hidden existence for these ritual organizations or a membership that was kept secret, everyone was usually well aware of the existence of these societies and knew who belonged to them (e.g., Brandt 1977:22). Members even flaunted the fact that they had been initiated, and they usually put on public displays to awe everyone in their communities with their arcane and profane powers.

The real "secret" was the ritual knowledge that members claimed was the key to their supposed arcane supernatural powers. The most important secrets were known only by the highest ranking members of secret societies. As Brandt (1980:130) observed among the Hopi, the secrecy was internal, not external. Secret knowledge was kept from lower ranking members as well as from the public. Such knowledge was typically supernatural in nature but need not have been.

BEHIND THE SECRET DOOR: A DEFINITION

In anthropology, any non-kinship organization is referred to as a "sodality." Sodalities can be organizations based on politics, sports, occupational specializations, rituals, music, dance, military roles, or almost any other activities. Secret societies are a ritual type of sodality (Driver 1969). However, there can be many different types of ritual sodalities. Secret societies differ from other types of religious sodalities in a number of key respects, according to Warren and Laslett (1980:26–31) and Johansen (2004:13). At one end of the spectrum are inclusive or "open associations," such as religious-based charity organizations which welcome participation from anyone and have no secret doctrines. At the other end of the spectrum are "secret associations," or secret societies, which exhibit exclusive access to knowledge that is generally used for

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purposes of controlling spirits as well as controlling people. Characteristically, membership in these organizations, at least for the higher ranks, is voluntary and based on the ability to pay progressively exorbitant advancement fees. The political position of a family in the community is often important as well. Many, but not all, activities are concealed from the public. When many researchers refer to "ritual sodalities," as is common in the American Southwest, they almost always are referring to secret society types of organizations.

There have been a number of attempts to define secret societies in more specific terms. Wedgewood's (1930:131–2) definition of secret society is "a voluntary association whose members are possessed of some knowledge of which non-members are ignorant."

I prefer to be a little more specific and to follow Johansen (2004:10) in defining a secret society as *an association with internal ranks in which membership, especially in upper ranks, is exclusive, voluntary, and associated with secret knowledge*.

Entrance and advancement fees are one of the hallmarks of secret societies as a means of excluding those deemed undesirable (Loeb 1929:256). Like pyramid schemes everywhere, secret societies provide the greatest benefits to those in the upper ranks. In order to distinguish these types of organizations from relatively elaborate tribal initiations, it may be necessary to include the stipulation that secret societies – at least in their more developed forms, as opposed to the derivative types discussed below, see "Classifications" – involve the production and surrender of significant surpluses, or even that they involve power-based (or defensive) motivations in their organization as well as in the recruitment of members. Because of the variability displayed in ritual organizations that have been identified as secret societies by various authors, it may eventually prove to be necessary to use a looser, more polythetic approach to defining secret societies. In polythetic classifications, no one criterion is absolutely essential as long as most criteria are met. However, such an involved undertaking is beyond the scope of this book and a task for the future. For the present purposes, it is sufficient to be able to discuss some of the major recognized examples of secret societies in the ethnographic literature.

TRIBAL INITIATIONS, SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS, ORIGINS, AND GRAY AREAS

Despite the best attempts to craft a definition of secret societies, there remains a gray area in which secret societies can be difficult to distinguish from other organizations. This is especially true when dealing with elaborate tribal initiations such as occur in some Australian Aboriginal societies (a problem recognized by Webster 1932:90–2; Elkin 1945:4; Eliade 1964:65), as well as among American Plains cultures with their age grades or warrior societies (Peters 1995:52). Other examples of gray areas involve the induction of all boys

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in a community into the lower ranks of some secret societies such as those in Melanesia and in New Guinea (Eliade 1964:65), the West African groups that adopted the *Poro* (MacKenzie 1967:26), and Nuuchalnulth groups in which the Wolf Society was prominent. In the inclusion of all males, and sometimes all females, they resembled tribal initiations. However, in these widely recognized examples of secret societies, there existed subsequent higher grades of secret knowledge to which far fewer individuals had access and these high-ranking members were generally the most powerful and wealthy people in hereditary descent groups. In effect, the general level of initiation versus the more restricted levels of initiation can be viewed as separate ritual organizations with the higher ranks constituting the core of the secret societies. This situation is surprisingly common in organizations that anthropologists have labeled as secret societies, many of which are considered classic examples such as the *Poro*, *Ekkpo*, *Suque*, and Wolf Societies. However, similar types of organizations have not generally been considered secret societies in Australia (see Chapter 7).

Several anthropologists have interpreted these and other features as indications that secret societies originated from tribal initiations through a process of progressive restriction of membership at later initiation stages (possibly through age grading) which required specific abilities, kin group membership, and wealth (Webster 1932:2,20,76,83,93–4,135). Other commonalities with tribal initiations include the hard physical ordeals involved, the frequent death and rebirth themes, seclusion periods, special clubhouses or men's houses, and rituals of reintroduction into mainstream society often with new identities of initiates (Webster 1932:2,135).

However, a key difference is that, in general, tribal initiations function to prepare adolescents to take on adult roles, to marry, and to maintain community traditions (Webster 1932:139). In contrast, secret societies seem to function to concentrate power in the hands of a few exclusive high-ranking individuals who control the organization and who try to further their own interests, thus constituting a "rude but powerful aristocracy" (Webster 1932:78,83). However, the same thing has sometimes been said about Australian Aborigine initiations that are not generally considered as secret societies (see Chapter 7).

Early in the twentieth century, Wedgewood (1930:134–5) raised this issue, stating that initiation into secret societies and initiation into a community of males in Melanesia "often bear a close resemblance to one another, for in both the candidate or novice is apprised of some secret or secrets of which formerly he was ignorant. But … from a sociological point of view they are distinct, the one being optional in the limited degree indicated … the other compulsory." Membership in secret societies "is not preordained … as is membership of family, clan, or tribe."

As suggested in the discussion of definitions, one possible way to distinguish secret societies from tribal initiations may be on the basis of the production

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and surrender of surplus production (wealth) from the initiate's family. This is generally not a prominent feature of tribal initiations. In Webster's (1932:104) view, with the emergence of secret societies "religious aspects become more and more a delusion and serve as a cloak to hide merely material and selfish ends." There are also varying degrees of ritual knowledge that are involved in membership in different societies. In organizations where little ritual knowledge is involved, the issue must be addressed as to whether they are fundamentally secret societies or societies based mainly on some other kind of common interests such as warfare, social entertainment, wealth acquisition, or mutual help, with only a superficial overlay of ritual secrecy.

In fact, all of the above kinds of organizations (tribal initiations, age grades, social or entertainment sodalities, military associations, and others) may co-exist in a community and blend into secret societies, creating considerable confusion in any attempt to unravel the importance of secret societies. In addition, ethnographers have largely focused almost exclusively on the more impressive main secret societies with only occasional passing references to minor secret societies, which sometimes were prolific and exhibited somewhat different features, such as defending members from the depredations of more powerful secret societies.

Another complication is that some groups such as the Pueblos of the American Southwest and communities in Vanuatu had numerous secret societies. While all males were not required to join any one particular society, *all* males were expected to become members of one society of their choice. Such situations raise further difficulties in terms of recognizing exclusive ritual organizations unless there was a ranked hierarchy of such organizations, which there usually was.

In addition to these considerations, secret societies sometimes took the form of military fraternities and involved ancestor worship, thus blurring the distinctions between these different types of organization. However, ancestor worship can be distinguished on the basis of an exclusive worship of ancestors within a lineage, whereas the invocation of "ancestors" in secret society contexts included ancestors from different kinship groups, and often simply pertained to previous office holders in the secret society, whether related by kinship or not.

Thus, defining secret societies and distinguishing them from other types of organizations is far from straightforward. Hence, I have attempted to deal with the clearest ethnographic examples of secret societies in the following chapters.

ORIGINS

As just noted, some ethnographers have viewed secret societies as developing out of tribal initiations (e.g., Webster 1932). In contrast, on America's Northwest

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Coast, Drucker (1941:229–30) viewed secret societies as resulting from a fusion of shamanism, warfare, mythological elements, hereditary privileges, potlatching, and the guardian spirit complex. Garfield and Wingert (1977:46) also noted the strong resemblance of secret society initiations to individual guardian spirit quests, and one might add, shamanic initiations. Certainly, there were many shamanic elements in secret societies, including possession, throwing power, use of prestidigitation, curing, and often even the honorific title conferred on secret society members of "shaman" (Drucker 1941:229–30). In fact, Eliade (1964:313) stated that "the relations between shamanism and the various North American secret societies and mystical movements is decidedly complex and far from being solved." "The chief difference between traditional shamanism and the secret societies lies in the fact that the latter are open to anyone who displays some predisposition to ecstasy, who is willing to pay the required fee, and, above all, who consents to submit to the necessary apprenticeship and initiatory ordeals" (Eliade 1964:314). Shamanic circles tend to be exclusive, whereas "secret societies … display a quite marked spirit of proselytism that … tends to abolish the special privilege of shamans" (Eliade 1964:314). In general, "shamans usually share in the activities of the most important secret societies, and sometimes take them over entirely" (Eliade 1964:315). Although the formal issue of *how* secret societies emerged can be debated (whether from shamanism, tribal initiations, military organizations, or other origins), this issue is not of critical importance to the focus of the present study, which is more concerned with *why* secret societies were created and what sociopolitical roles they played.

CLASSIFICATIONS

While a number of anthropologists have proposed classifications of secret societies, from an archaeological perspective these have not been very useful or insightful. Some of the suggested distinctions have involved:

1. Classifications by stated function or declared purpose, e.g., political, militaristic, moralist, civic, professional, or patriotic (MacKenzie 1967:16).
2. Dichotomous classifications based on the distinction between support for existing political leaders and those who oppose existing leaders (Walter 1969; Tefft 1980a:14). The formation of secret societies that oppose the existing political structure is probably most characteristic of state-level societies or colonial situations; however, precursors may have existed in some transegalitarian or chiefdom-level societies where competing secret societies developed to defend members from predatory activities of the dominant secret societies. Some traditional secret societies were also created in attempts to rival the power of the dominant secret societies.

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3 Other dichotomous classifications distinguish between secret societies that benefit members and non-members alike (i.e., ones that benefit the entire community) and those that benefit only the members at the expense of the community. Wedgewood characterized the latter organizations as a pathological development (1930:135–6). As will become apparent in the following chapters, I suspect that this distinction was based primarily on Wedgewood's theoretical commitment to a structuralist-functionalist view of culture as well as an over-reliance on the public rhetoric of secret society members rather than their actual practices.

For the purpose of the present analysis, neither the rhetoric of secret societies nor their publicly expressed purposes (special abilities or functions) are critical for understanding their underlying nature or their reasons for existing. While social anthropological classifications may not be of great use for archaeological purposes, or for understanding the underlying dynamics of secret societies, it is nevertheless important to recognize that there was considerable diversity within the rubric of secret societies. Like the ethnographic record on traditional feasting, most ethnographic observers seem to have focused almost exclusively on the biggest and most dramatic manifestations of secret societies while largely ignoring smaller, less flamboyant versions which generally lacked significant power, memberships, or resources. Thus, except for some minor details, we simply do not know what the smaller, less important secret societies were like.

For my purposes, I find it useful to recognize the following distinctions based largely on the extent to which power was pursued and the ability to pursue it.

1 *Power-oriented societies*. These are the classic cases of secret societies as described in the most prominent ethnographies and I suspect represent the initial form of the first secret societies. Examples include the *Hamatsa*, the *Poro*, the *Ekkpo*, and the *Suque* Societies, which often used terror indiscriminately to enforce their grip on power. However, distinctions also need to be made between the dominant, highest-ranked secret societies, and the much smaller, weaker, upstart, "wannabe," ephemeral secret societies that constantly appeared and disappeared as on the Plains and the Northwest Coast, which may have had much lower admission and advancement costs, or even none at all, so as to attract people to become members. We can expect that as such startup societies became more popular and powerful, their initiation and advancement costs increased proportionately.
2 *Militaristic secret societies*. These societies also generally emphasized the exercise of power in communities, but were largely concerned with developing or acquiring protective medicines and/or guardian spirits that would make members immune to attacks in battles. As with power-based secret societies, there was probably a

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range of sizes and powers among these societies, with one or a few being dominant and others being of minor importance.

3 *Curing and fertility societies*. Ostensibly, these societies were benevolent and operated for the benefit of their community without the use of terror. However, they typically charged high fees for cures or rituals, and in a number of cases, members reportedly induced sicknesses in non-members in order to obtain substantial fees for the cures. This could be considered a subtler form of terror tactic. There was probably a range of sizes and powers among these societies, with one or a few being dominant and others being of minor importance.

4 *Defensive secret societies*. These formed in some areas like Africa in order to defend members from the predatory attacks of the dominant power-oriented societies. They can be considered as a derivative type of the power-oriented and militaristic types. Defensive societies may also have had nominal or no initiation and advancement costs in order to swell their ranks and create greater defensive power in numbers. However, information on these societies is very limited and it is not clear how central any secret supernatural knowledge was in these organizations.

There may be other distinctions that would be useful; however, for the moment, the preceding distinctions are the main factors of concern. In most of this book, I will be focusing on the first and second types of secret societies, the power-oriented societies and the militaristic societies, since these are overwhelmingly the types reported in the ethnographies, and since they were arguably the most important forces in their communities, especially in creating important cultural changes. I will also propose a more evolved type of *regional secret society polity* in Chapters 10 and 11.

GENERAL CONTEXTS

An early map showing the distribution of known cultures with secret societies was published by Loeb (1929:286). However, subsequent ethnographic work and considerations have added to these areas, as suggested by the consideration of the Maya cargo system (Chapter 4) and European Benandanti or Calusari cults (Chapter 10) as secret societies. It is of considerable interest to note that secret society initiations are usually lacking in areas of high culture as well as among most generalized hunter/gatherers (Loeb 1929:285–6; Driver 1969:349,360,396).

In general, secret societies tend to have occurred in complex transegalitarian societies (whether hunter/gatherers or horticulturalists) and chiefdoms. I have argued that secret societies were one of a number of resource-based strategies (including feasting, prestige items, high funerary costs, high marriage costs, and military alliances) used by ambitious individuals

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to increase their control over people and resources (B. Hayden 2003). In more general terms, Marx and Engels (1968) viewed social complexity as developing when the production of goods beyond subsistence requirements resulted in the production of surpluses used for other purposes. In contrast, Morton Fried (1967) argued that complexity emerged from shortages engendered by population growth with control of resources retained by original owners. At least in the case of the American Western Pueblos, according to Levy (1992:38,42), the best land was owned by clans, with the highest ranked clan controlling twice as much land as was needed for their subsistence needs. There was no obligatory sharing of maize harvests. Levy (1992:55) maintained that access to land was obtained by acquiring ritual roles. However, owing to the high costs of obtaining ritual paraphernalia and hosting the required ritual feasts, it can be argued that the main factor in acquiring ritual roles was owning productive land or at least acquiring access to its produce. It seems clear that in a broader context, ritual complexity, with its attendant political complexity, was fundamentally associated with surplus production either by one's family or of extended kin or others. Similarly, among hunters and gatherers, secret societies occurred where surpluses could be produced rather than in stressed environments (see especially Chapters 2 and 3).

These notions make good sense in terms of Driver's (1969:349,360,396) and Ware's (2014:34) observations that ritual sodalities were rare in simple hunting/gathering societies but common in tribal societies where they often had warrior overtones or foci (Ware 2014:35). Driver (1969:349) categorically states that secret societies were "possible only in a society with a large surplus of food and other necessities." However, Ware (2014) and others also argued that secret societies were rare in complex polities like states. Whether this was a general pattern or not still requires some analysis, but, as discussed in Chapter 11, there appear to have been instances where other state-level organizations, including state religions, evolved from secret societies and supplanted the original types of secret organizations.

MOTIVATIONS

Some ethnographers have argued that secret societies were formed to benefit the community, such as by healing the sick or planting sacred tobacco to preserve the tribe and the culture (e.g., the Crow Tobacco Society mentioned by Wedgewood 1930:136–7). Wedgewood reflects the structural-functionalist bias of her time, maintaining that social institutions continued to exist only if they fulfilled a definite function and played a significant role in the life of a society (Wedgewood 1930:129). Some of the most commonly cited beneficial roles of secret societies include healing and judicial functions, e.g., the *Egbo*

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Society (Calabar), the *Esu* and *Ogboni* Societies (Yoruba), the *Yewe* Society (Gold Coast), and the *Tenda* Society (French Guinea).

Probably the motive most frequently invoked by archaeologists to explain ritual elaboration, including the development of kivas and ritual sodalities, has also involved a structural-functionalist model. Above all, social unity or integration has been viewed as the main motivator for ritual developments, especially in the American Southwest where "ceremonial life was sufficient to prevent the alienation of the common people" (Levy 1992:69,78). This school of interpretation has also been strongly represented in the Middle East where the most popular view among archaeologists is still that social solidarity was the major concern for the growing communities of complex hunter/gatherers and early Neolithic horticulturalists. The result has been that almost all evidence of ritual or ritual organizations or practices has been interpreted as functioning to *integrate* diverse groups and interests in the growing communities (Bar-Yosef and Belfer Cohen 1989:488–90; 1991:189; Kuijt 1996; 2000; Bar-Yosef 2001:7; 2002:104; Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen 2008; Belfer-Cohen and Goring-Morris 2013; Grosman and Munro 2016; for the Southwest, see Longacre 1964; Hill 1966; Levy 1992:57,69,78; McGuire and Saitta 1996:209–11; and others cited in Ware 2014:14). However, it might be briefly noted that if the role of secret societies was to promote social solidarity within communities, one should expect a single organization within communities that had a large ceremonial facility to accommodate many people. Instead, there were frequently two or three or more secret society organizations using small ritual buildings within communities which makes sense primarily in more exclusive competitive contexts. This is discussed further in Chapters 10 and 11.

Other functionalist views of Southwestern religion have maintained that ritual societies operated primarily to redistribute agricultural products. McGuire and Saitta (1996:209–11) proposed that the hierarchies in secret societies of the Southwest were adaptive in the context of recurring times of stress by securing resources for original inhabitants or high-ranking members while forcing others to find alternative sources of food, e.g., by resorting to hunting and gathering (McGuire and Saitta 1996:209).

In contrast to these functionalist or communitarian models, another strong tradition in anthropology, extending back to Marx, views control over ritual as a means to dominate political power and others (Bloch 1974; Whitehouse 1992:147–9; Dietler 2001:70). Where this is true, Whitehouse argues that "religious knowledge is regarded as both powerful and dangerous," especially to the untrained, and that "religious language and ritual serves to express and reinforce relations of authority; it works therefore not in the interests of society as a whole, but in those of the religious leaders" (Whitehouse 1992:149–50; see also Bloch 1974). The key link in the dynamics of such organizations is promoting religious knowledge as being "vital to the health of society," so that

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"access to such knowledge would provide a route to political power, while exclusion from it would be a critical disadvantage" (Whitehouse 1992:152).

This view of secret societies is in fundamental agreement with the vast majority of ethnographic observations as well as with the political ecological approach that I have espoused (Hayden 2014). Political ecology, or paleo-political ecology to be more precise, studies the ways in which surplus production has been used by ambitious, aggrandizing individuals to obtain benefits for themselves, including survival, reproduction, security, wealth, political power, and higher standards of living. In the political ecology view that I adopt in this book, both feasts and secret societies constitute major aggrandizer strategies for achieving these goals *based on the production and control of surplus resources*, especially in the form of reciprocal feasting debts or as fees for the admission, advancement, or services of secret societies.

The ethnographic record provides considerable support for the political ecology interpretation of secret societies. The motive behind prospective initiates willingly paying the typically high prices for initiation and advancement was sometimes explicitly stated to be the prospect of gaining even more power and wealth in the community by attaining a higher rank in the secret society. In contrast to the altruistic motives expressed by Wedgewood, she elsewhere admitted that "more selfish and less exalted motives do doubtless influence a man in seeking membership … [t]he lure which is held out to them is the lure of prestige," and that some societies performed no religious rites on behalf of the community (Wedgewood 1930:138). In even more blatant terms, she later states that "if the members of a secret association are to enjoy the sense of power and privilege, the acquisition of which was one of their reasons for becoming members, they must, as it were, demonstrate their secrecy publicly … they must make themselves felt as a force" (Wedgewood 1930:144).

After reviewing secret societies in a number of different cultures, Johansen (2004) concluded that the underlying motivation of the organizers of secret societies was to promote their own self-interests by creating a hegemonic control over rituals and experiences that they claimed gave them supernatural powers or influence. From the examples that will be discussed in the following chapters, I concur completely with Johansen. While few members or leaders of secret societies might overtly express their motivations in such self-serving terms (although some did), actions speak louder than words; and, as will be seen, their actions seem difficult to interpret in terms other than the promotion of members' self-interests. As Simmel (1950:367) stated: "The secret group pursues its own purposes with the same inconsiderateness for all purposes outside itself which, in the case of the individual, is precisely called egoism."

Toward this end, in general, Wolf (1999:69) maintained that constructed connections with supernatural forces could be used to provide elites a unique cosmological aura that allowed them to promote their authority and others'

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obedience to them in a socially acceptable manner. Even here, just how socially acceptable some of the practices were is very questionable.

Secret society organizations often transparently functioned to maintain or extend political and economic control. For example, the *Tamate Livoa* Society in the Banks Islands was used by chiefs to enforce peace among villages (Bradfield 1973, cited in Tefft 1980b:53) and the *Poro* Society of the Mende (Sierra Leone) was used by chiefs to police their territories and ensure proper responses to the directions of paramount chiefs (Bozeman 1976, cited in Tefft 1980b:53). Similarly, the leaders of Taos pueblo ritual sodalities constituted the political leadership (Brandt 1977:17,19,24–5).

If the main underlying motive of secret societies was the concentration of power and surplus production, then it makes sense that internal hierarchies would be a key component of the organizational structures. The public display of the power and wealth of the society also makes sense if the basic motivation was to enhance members' own powers, since success and wealth were generally portrayed by secret societies as an indication of spiritual power (see Hayden 2014). This is one of the many ideological transformations that ambitious individuals undoubtedly promulgated to serve their own ends. As previously noted, wealth was also an essential element for initiation and advancement – yet another example of an ideological construct devised to enhance benefits for higher ranking members. None of these, or other, features of secret societies are comprehensible if the purpose of secret societies was to provide benefits for the entire community.

In addition to these ethnographic observations, psychological studies tend to support the self-interested motives of secret society organizers and the general view that aggrandizer personality types dominated secret societies. Notably, Piff et al. (2012:4086) found that "upper-class individuals behave more unethically than lower-class individuals … were more likely to take valued goods from others … to lie in a negotiation … to cheat to increase their chances of winning a prize … and endorse unethical behavior at work." They had "more favorable attitudes toward greed." As will be shown, these are precisely the kinds of attitudes that characterize secret society officials, as well as aggrandizers in general and sociopaths in particular (Hare 1993). Piff (2013) has also found that as wealth increases, the wealthy are more likely to feel entitled to good things, and that they see themselves as above normal laws and morals – an aspect of tribal and chiefly aggrandizers repeatedly observed by ethnographers (see Hayden 2014, 2016). These are also noted characteristics of many of the high-ranking secret society leaders to be described. The wealthy tend to morally defend greed and to be more indifferent to others. The more resources they have, the more they generally want and the more they prioritize their self-interests and are willing to do things to serve their self-interests. Clearly, not everyone in any given population has or had these

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attitudes, and such tendencies may be sharply curtailed where surpluses are less certain (e.g., the American Southwest). However, a small percentage of all populations do have aggrandizer traits strongly developed, and it seems that they, by and large, become the elites and gravitate toward positions of power, including memberships and high positions in secret societies. They are relentlessly aggressive in getting what they want and in trying to change attitudes, norms, and rules to favor their strategies.

KEY ISSUES

Social Integration vs. Competition and Division

As just discussed, there are major differences of opinion on whether secret societies were established for the good of the community or for the self-interests of secret society members, especially the high-ranking members. Related to this is the issue of whether secret societies served as socially integrative organizations, as so often claimed by archaeologists, or whether they actually increased socioeconomic and political inequalities, divisiveness, and factionalization.

The Power of Belief vs. the Power of Power

Whether many of the high-ranking members of secret societies, or their followers, or the general populace, actually believed in claims by members to possess supernatural powers is difficult to determine, especially given the substantial variations that characterize beliefs between individuals. It seems highly unlikely that everyone in a community believed everything that they were taught, or all the claims that others promoted including members of secret societies. Undoubtedly some people did believe various claims, but equally certain from the accounts of secret societies is the fact that many people did not believe the claims but simply viewed them as a means of manipulating people. Even if people exhibited public compliance to beliefs or norms, this would not necessarily have meant that they privately believed in them or even accepted them (Willer et al. 2009). In many cases, outward compliance to norms or beliefs was due to external pressures rather than any acceptance of beliefs.

Nor was there any lack of overt skeptics who mocked the standard beliefs. In medieval Europe – supposedly governed by superstition and belief – the "prior of Holy Trinity, London reported in 1200 that 'many believe neither in good nor in bad angels, nor in life or death or any other spiritual things which they cannot see with their own eyes.' There were scoffers, complained Vincent of Beauvais, who openly laughed at graphic representations of Hell" (Sumption 1975:19). Tribal societies were no different. Many individuals in tribal societies

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were indifferent to religious claims. Reay (1959:131) reported that most Kuma individuals in New Guinea did not have a working knowledge of their own religious doctrines or myths, even though these were readily accessible. Barth (1987:69,71) found that doctrines were important in New Guinea cults but that they were mostly viewed as metaphors and not really believed in. He also documented, even within very small-scale societies, great variability in views, interests, and knowledge about sacred matters (Barth 1987:78). Jean Clottes (2016:57) provides an example of a native guide who did not believe in spirits, yet conducted propitiation rituals before entering sacred sites. The Chin expressed an "indifferent faith" in the gods, and Lehman (1963:175,207) doubted that all people believed in gods. Among the Lamet in Laos, Izikowitz (1951:321) reported that about 10 percent of the community was agnostic or atheistic, and I found a similar proportion of skeptics among the Highland Maya villages where I worked. Indeed, in the following chapters, there are repeated references to "doubters" of secret society claims and the need to ferret out those individuals and deal with them (see the "Enforcement" sections in Chapters 2–9). Many of the Osage were indifferent to priestly concerns about religion (Bailey 1995). The beliefs among the Omaha concerning the supernatural and religious claims ranged from acceptance to skepticism to rejection (Fortune 1932:53,55). While some Osage may have believed that sacred bundles harbored mysterious and dangerous powers, others considered bundles simply as adjuncts to rituals without any power (Bailey 1995:47,62,278–9). Other elite or secret society ideologies were clearly not accepted by many commoners who were portrayed as "irreverent." In fact, most people displayed little interest in sacred knowledge (Bailey 1995). A similar range of beliefs has been reported by Metcalf (1996:271,279) concerning headhunting in Borneo. He concluded that there was a lack of dogma in almost all traditional religions; ritual praxis was far more important than beliefs. In fact, anything could be used to stand for anything else, as he paraphrases Needham. This is similar to Leach's (1954:x,4,14,106) study of social norms in Kachin society, where there were so many conflicting and contradictory statements that Leach concluded there was no cultural system. There were only contingent claims that were called upon depending upon circumstances and the motives of the actors. Barth (1987:78–85) found the same to be true in New Guinea. Thus, although some ethnographers reported that initiations into secret societies could have resulted in an increased religious feeling for some people, such initiations only created disillusionment and degradation of religious feeling for others (e.g., Fortune 1932:4). These observations indicate that it is unrealistic to view the so-called power of belief as a major force for cultural change in tribal societies without other factors being strongly involved.

Rather than viewing specific beliefs or values as being universally held by entire communities – as seems typical of archaeological discussions and even

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most ethnographies – it is probably more realistic to view beliefs as varying widely, encompassing even mutually incompatible beliefs. Some claims of beliefs could thus be drawn upon at certain times and under certain conditions (e.g., the biblical turning the other cheek), while other beliefs could be used at other times and conditions (e.g., biblical enjoinders to take an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth). Following Leach (1954:x,4–5), it seems more accurate to view beliefs and values like tools to be taken out, given lip service, and appealed to when needed or appropriate to serve as a warrant for particular behavior, decisions, or actions. Under certain conditions, some expressions of belief might have responded better to the interests of the majority or to special interest groups, but everything was constantly in flux and could change, much like the fluctuating quantum states of matter that have varying probabilities of existing or coming into existence over time. From this perspective, the widespread occurrence of, or major changes in, specific beliefs – or at least expressions of beliefs and actual ritual behavior – would have had to involve clear practical benefits for them to be widely accepted and to spread. Examining secret societies may provide important insights into how this could have been achieved.

Thus, as Harris (1979) has argued, beliefs per se are probably not the most important factor in explaining cultural practices or developments like the building of megaliths or temples or the acquisition of power by chiefs. Moreover, it is almost impossible to determine or untangle the complex web of specific beliefs of individuals in living populations, much less what they were in prehistoric populations. What was of the utmost importance in tribal religions was praxis, or conformity to required public behavior. Actual beliefs were largely irrelevant (B. Hayden 2003).

A number of strategies could be used to leverage acquiescence for public acceptance of ideological claims and practices. Strategies probably included the use of food gifts to obtain tacit acceptance of hosts' claims made in the context of feasts (e.g., concerning ancestry, the power of ancestors or talismans, the costs of marriages, the favor of the gods, and similar claims), leverage exerted via debt relationships, simple verbal claims and arguments, and the judicious use of threats or even force to obtain compliance. Sociologists have made some important studies of why people acquiesce to demands for compliance in ritual support or behavior (Willer et al. 2009). They have noted that it is generally difficult to distinguish true convictions from social posturing (452) and that frequently, private attitudes and beliefs differ from publicly expressed attitudes even though the public behavior conforms to cultural norms or ideals (456). Beliefs that are not beneficial to most people can even become publicly entrenched "when backed up by expectations of enforcement that are confirmed when one deviates" (482). So, external pressures, including

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enforcement, were most likely to have been involved in obtaining general acquiescence to publicly expressed beliefs and public participation in secret society rituals that were not beneficial for all.

Indeed, there are repeated references in all culture areas to the killing of doubters of secret society dogmas or those who mocked the spirits of the secret societies even if the doubters were the sons of chiefs. This indicates, first, that not everyone believed the ideological rhetoric promulgated in the community, and second, that acquiescence in outward behavior and expression was forced upon many community members if other means of persuasion were not effective. Contrary to many archaeologists' appeal to the power of beliefs in explaining monumental ritual architecture, we can only conclude that it was not the power of beliefs or superior ideologies, or even superior ritual experiences, that formed the basis of power in most ritual organizations, but simply the power to exact acquiescence for the ideological and other dictates of the leaders. As will be seen in the following chapters, this was manifestly the case with secret societies.

However, it must also be acknowledged that besides the non-believers and non-accepters, there was undoubtedly an equal number of people, if not more people, in all communities who accepted uncritically anything that self-proclaimed ritual specialists might claim. Such "gullible" people would have made it worth the effort to put on convincing ritual displays. Despite the ready support of the more gullible members of communities, doubters could not be tolerated as they could spread their doubts and counterclaims and thereby threaten the claims to authority and the power base of secret societies or elites. In order to intimidate any dissenters or doubters, those who ventured into secret society's areas or witnessed their activities, whether from curiosity or by accident, were typically killed, or if deemed desirable, were promptly initiated.

The Use of Terror and Human Sacrifice

In view of these arguments, it becomes important to determine the extent to which terror was used by secret societies. This will be a particular focus in the following chapters. The term "terrorist" was used in these contexts long before it became a common descriptor in the twenty-first-century media. As part of terror-based strategies, the practice of human sacrifice and cannibalism (or minimally, the threat of these practices) will also be examined. Whether cannibalism was really employed in secret societies or not, or even in any traditional societies, has long been a sensitive issue with conflicting interpretations of the accounts. At least in some cases that will be described, there seems to have been little doubt as to the reality of the practices, but how common this was overall is still open to debate.

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Roles in Emerging Complexity

What role, if any, did secret societies play in creating more complex religious and political centers like Chavín de Huántar, the Puebloan great houses, Göbekli Tepe, and early state temples, as well as early state polities? This issue will be addressed further in Chapter 11.

Antiquity

There is considerable discussion in the literature about the relatively recent adoption, or even origin, of secret societies by many groups on the American Northwest Coast and Northwest Interior as well as other locations like California, the American Southwest (e.g., Drucker 1941:227–9), and Great Lakes region (Weeks 2009, 2012). While some *specific* societies may have originated in the years immediately before or during European contact, it is usually acknowledged that some basic forms of secret society were "ancient" or of "considerable age" (Drucker 1941:229). Drucker suggested that the Dog Eating Society may represent an archaic form of secret society that was relatively widespread in much earlier times and probably included staged disappearances, supernatural tricks, whistles, and the use of cedar bark. Early or archaic forms of secret societies may have been replaced by more recent variants. Early origins are also consonant with archaeological evidence in the Northwest Interior and the Lower Fraser Valley (Hayden and Adams 2004; Morin 2010; Ritchie 2010; see Chapter 10). In the Southwest, Ware (2014:76) interpreted the archaeological evidence as indicating the existence of secret societies at least from the eighth century of the Common Era, if not before, while the ritual paraphernalia used by the Historic *'Antap* Society in southern California existed by 1000 BCE (Corbett 2004; Gamble 2008).

Identifying Secret Societies Archaeologically

The antiquity of secret societies raises the issue of how they can be identified archaeologically. Therefore, a major focus of this book is on their material characteristics. There are a number of different archaeological indicators that can be used to identify secret societies, including special structures, locations, paraphernalia, burials, and evidence of sacrifices or cannibalism. However, given the material variability of ethnographic secret societies, no one criterion or set of criteria appears sufficient or necessary to identify them. It seems rather that archaeologists should use a polythetic and probabilistic approach to identifying the material remains of secret societies of the past. The more

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material indicators that can be identified, the more probable a given case can be considered as representing a secret society. Even on the basis of ethnographic observations, it is still unclear as to whether they were present in Polynesia or among any of the complex hunter/gatherers in Australia.

How to Define Secret Societies or Variants

Another issue that requires resolution is defining secret societies in more precise terms. As previously indicated, there are important gray areas in trying to distinguish between elaborate tribal initiation ceremonies, social or entertainment organizations, and secret societies. It is not always easy to identify critical distinguishing characteristics that satisfactorily separate these conceptual types of ritual or social organizations from hegemonic ritual sodalities based on secret knowledge.

Auxiliary Characteristics

In addition to the issue of how secret societies should be defined ethnologically, an important issue for archaeologists is what practices and roles were common, if not universal, characteristics of these organizations, especially ones that might reveal important insights into the nature of these institutions or which might be used to identify secret societies archaeologically. These will be described in more detail in the following chapters and the archaeological implications will be more fully discussed in Chapter 10. However, a few are briefly mentioned here in order to emphasize their theoretical importance in subsequent chapters.

Initially, on the basis of her work in Taos pueblo, Brandt (1980:126–8) observed that a major consequence of secrecy within sodalities was the establishment of status hierarchies based on access to knowledge communicated only in oral form. She argued that oral transmission of knowledge was especially well suited to creating a high degree of control over information, hence the frequent opposition to the recording of that knowledge in written form (Brandt 1980:133–4). Brandt (1994:14) among others (Tefft 1980a, 1980b, 1980c; Wiessner 1996) argued that equality is always difficult to maintain, but that one effective technique for maintaining inequality is the use of secret information and surveillance.

There were also almost always impressive public displays and feasts hosted by such societies. As Wedgewood (1930:144) noted early on:

> if the members of a secret association are to enjoy the sense of power and privilege, the acquisition of which was one of their reasons for becoming

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> members, they must, as it were, demonstrate their secrecy publicly. They must dance and parade through the village in their masks; they must make themselves felt as a force … any ritual which they perform inevitably interrupts the routine existence of the whole village or district. The interruption … has its unpleasant aspects, such as the beating of the uninitiated, the plundering of gardens, and the terrifying of women and children.

If secret societies were simply ritual associations for individuals who were extremely religious, such as monks, there would be no need for public displays. Ecstatic or other internal states could provide all the personal gratification necessary from such associations. That public displays – often associated with initiations, which were generally the most extravagant family expenditures in the lifetime of a household – were so prominent indicates that there was a major political or practical motivation behind the formation of secret societies. This is convenient for archaeologists since such public displays and feasts often – but not always – led to the construction of special structures or other facilities in which to hold these events (such as the Southwestern plazas or great kivas or the dance houses of Californian groups) in addition to the special paraphernalia and regalia required to impress spectators. Power animals were generally prominent in ideologies and displays. They served to symbolize and emphasize the power of secret societies. As part of the attempt to persuade spectators of members' supernatural and worldly powers, the public displays frequently included convincing demonstrations of power, both arcane and profane, such as staged putative supernatural abilities, and animal or human sacrifices. The elaborate and costly displays could provide a compelling pretext for requiring high initiation fees or contributions from community members to sustain the spiritual work of the organization.

In addition to the large public displays and facilities, the hierarchical organization of access to the ritual secrets of the organization often involved smaller, restricted, special ritual meeting places. In one of the few quasi-quantified estimates of the membership in such societies, only about 10 percent of the adults (Loeb 1926:365) were members of the *Kuksu* Societies in California, although in other cases it seems that the proportion could be higher (e.g., Gifford 1926:352–3).

The use of opulent ritual paraphernalia, costuming, and special foods is another frequent characteristic which underlines the self-interested political and economic motivations behind the formation of secret societies. Such materials were not required for ecstatic or other ritual experiences, as demonstrated by Australian Aboriginal initiations, monastic orders, ascetic hermits, and similar seekers of spiritual experiences. However, as Wedgewood (1930) argued, if

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claims to supernatural power over the material world were to be credible for the general public, then some superior demonstration involving the material world had to be made. Displaying ritual objects and unusual costuming that originated in exotic, faraway, or unknown locations, or that required unusual skill to make, could be used as such convincing demonstrations. Similarly, providing foods that were out of the normal (such as the flesh of "power animals," or even humans) could serve as demonstrations of unusual powers.

The important role of exotic materials and prestige items, including foods, could form unusual artifact assemblages which would be extremely helpful for archaeologists in identifying prehistoric examples of these organizations, although such use was not exclusive to them. Other political or kinship hierarchies also made good use of the same logic and strategies.

Secret societies generally also founded their claims to legitimacy on their ability to induce transcendent experiences, or *sacred ecstatic experiences* (SEEs), in initiates at various levels of advancement in their hierarchies. Such ecstatic personal experiences could validate claims of supernatural connections and were often associated with power animals and vision quests. The use of various techniques to induce altered states can sometimes be inferred archaeologically from the use of dark, sensory depriving environments or psychotropic materials, the presence of transformative iconographies, and the violation of taboos such as the eating of human flesh. Like initiations to gangster organizations or some college fraternities, physical and emotional ordeals also must have ensured loyalty to organizations and the maintenance of their secrets. As Bozeman (1976, cited in Tefft 1980b:53) emphasized, the costly proof of dedication to an organization and its ideology provided by these trials generally ensured members' loyalties to the secret organizations and superseded their responsibilities to all other groups.

In order to fund both secret and public events (as well as to increase the economic power of the organization, or more specifically, its leaders), secret societies had to be able to obtain considerable surplus production from the community or at least from junior members and their supporters.

In order to emphasize the overriding importance and power of the secret society, beyond family, kinship, or community allegiances, especially powerful high-ranking members of such societies were sometimes given special burials in close proximity to secret society facilities or in remote locations rather than with their own kin or community.

Secret societies generally needed a security system to protect their secrets, including spies, agents who spread false information, individuals to mete out punishments, as well as the use of threats, terror, and demonstrations of unleashed (uncontrolled) supernatural powers that required the protection of secret society ritual knowledge to bring them under control (Tefft 1980a:15–16).

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Finally, secret societies as a rule seem to have legitimized their spiritual claims to power by appropriating many of the pre-existing beliefs and ideological elements of their own cultures in order to make their claims more accepted (MacKenzie 1967:25). However, they typically added new levels of esoteric meaning to earlier religious beliefs, thereby transforming traditional ideologies into new systems using familiar symbols and concepts. Acceptance of, or acquiescence to, secret society ideological claims – especially among those who more easily accepted such claims – was important for facilitating hegemonic control within communities, and the adoption of parts of generally accepted ideologies and iconographies must have helped to achieve such acceptance.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The Power of Ritual in Prehistory is primarily designed as a theoretical and ethnographic resource book. It provides data on secret societies organized so that people with specific interests can focus on the aspects of most importance to them. It does not necessarily have to be read from cover to cover, although the subject of secret societies can be so engaging that some readers may want to read everything. Chapters 2–9 present ethnographic observations from specific culture areas. The larger chapters have *Introduction* and *Overview* sections that provide a quick summary of the regional traditions and the most important observations. These should alert readers to topics of interest which they can consult in more detail in the following data sections of each chapter.

Culture areas were chosen on the basis of a generally acknowledged presence of secret societies in the areas and the richness of their documentation. Thus, the main chapters deal with the American Northwest Coast, California, the North American Southwest, Eastern and Plains North America, West and Central Africa, and Oceania. There are undoubtedly other locations where secret societies existed in pre-industrial communities, but the documentation is not always as rich or as available as the more classic cases from these culture areas. My main aim was to examine a good representative selection of secret societies rather than achieve an exhaustive coverage. Chapter 10 discusses potential archaeological examples of prehistoric secret societies, and Chapter 11 summarizes the issues and observations of previous chapters, including an exploration of the implications of secret societies for the development of more centralized political and religious organizations. For consistency, I have referred to all sources, observations, and activities in the past tense, even though some secret societies continue to exist today.

I have relied heavily on early ethnographic accounts of secret societies because such societies were often driven underground or out of existence by colonial and missionizing policies in the early periods of contact. Even

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when they have managed to survive to modern times, secret societies have always been radically transformed by national policies, world economies, and missionary activities. We are exceptionally lucky to have the amazing accounts that were collected more than a century ago, sometimes at the cost of ethnographers' lives (e.g., Bernard Deacon). I hope readers appreciate the rare insights that these early accounts provide and that you find the observations on secret societies as fascinating as I have.

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