An Essay on Political Economies in Prehistory

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Tim Earle is an economic archaeologist, who studies social inequality, leadership, and political economy in early chiefdoms and states. He has conducted multi-year research projects in Polynesia, Peru, Argentina, Denmark, and Hungary, studying alternative pathways to centralized power. His books include Organizing Bronze Age Societies, Bronze Age Economics, How Chiefs Come to Power, and The Evolution of Human Societies.
This article presents a political economy approach to prehistory, showing how bottlenecks in diverse economic flows shaped contrasting economic formations. Differential control over the economy based on property relationships mobilized staple surpluses and wealth to form social institutions with varying structures of social and economic inequality and political power.