Core debate

How do monumental buildings get built?
Two options:
- Use of authority supervision over subjects completing the labour.
- Compel subjects to hand over resources which are then used to compensate workers hired by the state.

Either way involves a coercive transfer of energy, but differ in the taxpayers' obligations.

Advantages and disadvantages to each approach: e.g. Corvée labour is cheap and flexible for the state, but can be socially disruptive (interferes with livelihood of people).
Alternatively could have a smaller but more permanent workforce. This can involve higher skill levels and less social disruption but is much more expensive to the state.

Tradeoff therefore present between flexibility to respond to demand and increased skill and obedience.

Americas

Pre-Columbian = independent but parallel sociocultural evolution because of geographical isolation to rest of the world. Similar solutions between the Old and New Worlds can therefore be regarded as similar solutions to comparable problems.

Inca Empire	Corvée-based system. Empire which lasted around 100 years but spread over a wide variety of terrains. Economy of supply and demand -> State would tax individuals through mandatory services rather than household income. Rotational system ("mit'a") with 2-3 months of service on average, but no fixed duration - time required would vary based on demand.
	Work included military, agricultural duties and craft production. Large-scale building programs included monumental buildings, roads and terraces.
	Archaeological seems to show shift from generalised to specialised corvée labour. Ensured direct control over specialists by transferring groups en masse to the capital (Cuzco).
	Corvée labour centralised around a capital city which was very distant for many households did pose some problems: reduction of local production and teh mass deportation of individuals could be very disruptive to local economies and households. Relying on more specialised groups of workers that could be under direct control of the state therefore proved more beneficial.
	Workers were not compensated monetarily for corvée labour because of the inexistence of such economic systems, particularly in central territories.

Americas (cont)

Aztec Empire	Unlike the Inca, the Aztec did have monetary systems in place. However, commutation (converting services into payments) is also unheard of there, nor would the state hire laborers.

Japan

Shift from corvée labour (*buyaku*) as a key mechanism in the 8th cent. to specialised labour.
Corvée was imposed on all males aged 15-60.

Peasants provided labour and skilled craftsmen were hired for wages.

1630s onwards, specialised hired laborers gradually became more common than corvée ones which were encouraged to be left in the fields where they could contribute economically. Corvée also became used in transportation to boost commercialisation.

So corvée = global practice, but subject to change depending on the economical situation which could make hired labour more appealing at times.

Ancient Near East (Southwest Asia)

Mesopotamia	Corvée predates Sargon (2334-2279 BCE) - construction of canals and dikes seasonally against food rations.
Egypt	Some uncertainty still surrounds the explicit use of corvée labour in places such as Ancient Egypt with the pyramids.
New Kingdom (c. 1600-1100 BCE)	Military-supervised state construction projects using war captives. Armies used for mass workforce. Composed of captives and civilians, often used for large-scale brick manufacture. Similar uses in Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia.

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China

State upheld by corvée and penal servitude.

Qin and Han dynasties in 3rd century BCE - most adult population forced to partake in corvée.	Supposedly 3 months per year under the Qin and 1 month per year under the Han, although disputed information.

Most labour = performed locally, with some workers being transferred.

Han dynasty rulers had to deal with added sensitivity following the rule of the Qin dynasty where Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi had been brought down due to public discontent.

Most disruptive rules follow conquest -> early 12th century CE, draft of 2 million people to build new palaces. Many deaths due to failure to provide food.

Convict labour resorted to when costs incurred by transferring natives from their native setting were too high. Penal servitude provided a long term and large scale source of workers. Alternatively, states also had access to state-owned slaves.

Archaeological evidence in support of textual evidence:	Thousands of bodies found in cemeteries next to cities. Mostly men in their 20s/30s, often equipped with iron collars and sometimes tags recording their names and penalty.

Corvée and convict labour persisted throughout the rise of urbanisation, commercialisation and monetisation, therefore leading to commutation (unlike other case studies thus far).

Western Exceptionalism - Greek and Roman Labour

Bronze Age	Corvée in palace societies of the Bronze Age - evidence from Linear B.
Iron Age	No evidence for regular civilian corvée labour, but mandatory military enrolment = common.

Evidence is ambiguous - texts talking of Athenians "coming together" to erect the Long Walls - but up for interpretation.

Periods where evidence is more reliable seem to indicate labour market solutions.
- c.300 BCE, public building activity increases, arrangements with contractors.
- Migration to Rome + monetisation expands free-labour market to satisfy state demand.
- Only possible examples of corvée in road building? Locals sometimes held responsible for road maintenance.

Some examples of very light corvée in Spain (5 days a year).

Western Exceptionalism - Greek and Roman Labour (cont)

No evidence of penal servitude. Sometimes found in provinces.

Standard Athens - state uses slaves for some tasks, hired labour for others.

Conclusions

Overall, trend from coercion to labour markets and away from corvée towards contract labour.

Shift driven by urbanisation, commercialisation and monetisation.

Commutation sometimes arrises, but in places such as China and Egypt, corvée remains alongside forced labour controlled by the state.

Sociopolitical situation also key determining factor in type of labour.

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