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PRECOLONIAL BLACK AFRICA

A

Comparative Study of the Political and Social Systems of Europe and Black Africa, from Antiquity to the Formation of Modern States

To my professor Gaston Bachelard,
whose rationalistic teaching
nurtured my mind

To my professors M. André Leroi-Gourhan and Dean
André Aymard, who oversaw my work

All my gratitude

Contents

Preface

Until now [1960, date of the first edition], the history of Black Africa has always been written with dates as dry as laundry lists, and no one has almost ever tried to find the key that unlocks the door to the intelligence, the understanding of African society.

Failing which, no researcher has ever succeeded in re-vivifying the African past, in bringing it back to life in our minds, before our very eyes, so to speak, while remaining strictly within the realm of science.

Yet the documents at our disposal allow us to do that practically without any break in continuity for a period of two thousand years, at least insofar as West Africa is concerned.

Therefore, it had become indispensable to unfreeze, in a manner of speaking to defossilize that African history which was there at hand, lifeless, imprisoned in the documents.

However, this work is not properly speaking a book of history; but it is an auxiliary tool indispensable to the historian. It indeed affords him a scientific understanding of all the historical facts hitherto unexplained. In that sense, it is a study in African historical sociology. It permits us no longer to be surprised at the stagnation or rather the relatively stable equilibrium of precolonial African societies: the analysis of their socio-political structures presented in it allowing us to gauge the stabilizing factors in African society.

One thereby understands the technical and other lags to

be the result of a different kind of development based upon absolutely objective fundamental causes.

Thus, there is no longer any reason for embarrassment.

Once this awareness achieved, we can immediately and fully in almost every slightest detail relive all the aspects of African national life: the administrative, judicial, economic, and military organizations, that of labor, the technical level, the migrations and formations of peoples and nationalities, thus their ethnic genesis, and consequently almost linguistic genesis, etc.

Upon absorbing any such human experience, we sense deep within ourselves a true reinforcement of our feeling of cultural oneness.

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Chapter One

ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF CASTE

It seems necessary at the outset to point out the specific features of the caste system, in order more clearly to bring out the difference in social structure which has always existed between Europe and Africa. The originality of the system resides in the fact that the dynamic elements of society, whose discontent might have engendered revolution, are really satisfied with their social condition and do not seek to change it: a man of so-called "inferior caste" would categorically refuse to enter a so-called "superior" one.[1] In Africa, it is not rare for members of the lower caste to refuse to enter into conjugal relations with those of the higher caste, even though the reverse would seem more normal.

MAJOR DIVISIONS WITHIN THE CASTE SYSTEM

Let us proceed to a description of the internal structure of the caste system, before attempting an explanation of its origin. The present territory of Senegal will be used here as a model for study: nevertheless, the conclusions which are drawn from it hold true for the whole of detribalized Sudanese Africa. In Senegal, society is divided into slaves and freemen, the latter being *gor*, including both *gér* and *ñéño*.

The gér comprise the nobles and all freemen with no manual profession other than agriculture, considered a sacred activity.

The ñéño comprise all artisans: shoemakers, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, etc. These are hereditary professions.

The *djam*, or slaves, include the *djam-bur*, who are slaves of the king; the *djam neg nday*, slaves of one's mother; and the *djam neg bây*, slaves of one's father. The *gér* formed the superior caste. But—and herein lay the real originality of the system—unlike the attitude of the nobles toward the bourgeoisie, the lords toward the serfs, or the Brahmans toward the other Indian castes, the *gér* could not materially exploit the lower castes without losing face in the eyes of others, as well as their own. On the contrary, they were obliged to assist lower caste members in every way possible: even if less wealthy, they had to "give" to a man of lower caste if so requested. In exchange, the latter had to allow them social precedence.

The specific feature of this system therefore consisted in the fact that the manual laborer, instead of being deprived of the fruits of his labor, as was the artisan or the serf of the Middle Ages, could, on the contrary, add to it wealth given him by the "lord."

Consequently, if a revolution were to occur, it would be initiated from above and not from below. But that is not all, as we shall see: members of all castes including slaves were closely associated to power, as de facto ministers; which resulted in constitutional monarchies governed by councils of ministers, made up of authentic representatives of all the people. We can understand from this why there were no revolutions in Africa against the regime, but only against those who administered it poorly, i.e., unworthy princes. In addition, there were, of course, also palace revolutions.

For every caste, advantages and disadvantages, deprivations of rights and compensations balanced out. So it is outside of consciences, in material progress and external influences, that the historical motives must be sought. Taking into account their isolation, which however must not be exaggerated, it can be understood why Africa's societies remained relatively stable.

CONDITIONS OF THE SLAVES

The only group that would have an interest in overthrowing the social order were the slaves of the father's household, in alliance with the *bâ-dolo* ("those without power," socially speaking, the poor peasants).[2] Indeed, it is clear from what preceded that the status of the artisans was an enviable one. Their consciences could in no way be bearers of the seeds of revolution: being the principal beneficiaries of the monarchical regime, they defend it up to this day, or regret its passing.

By definition, all slaves should make up the revolutionary class. One can easily imagine the state of mind of a warrior or any freeman whose condition through defeat in war radically changes from one day to the next, as he becomes a slave: as in classical antiquity, prisoners of war were automatically subject to being sold. Persons of rank might be ransomed by their families, who would give in exchange a certain number of slaves. In principle, one could have a nephew serve as a substitute: a man's sister's son, in this matriarchal regime, would be given by his uncle in ransom; whence the two Wolof expressions, *na djây* ("may he sell," i.e., the uncle), and *djar bât* ("he who can buy back," i.e., the nephew). But this is where the slaves come in.

In this aristocratic regime, the nobles formed the cavalry of the army (the chivalry). The infantry was composed of slaves, former prisoners of war taken from outside the national territory. The slaves of the king formed the greater part of his forces and in consequence their condition was greatly improved. They were now slaves in name only. The rancor in their hearts had been lightened by the favors they received: they shared in the booty after an expedition; under protection of the king, during periods of social unrest, they could even indulge in discreet pillage within the national territory, against the poor peasants, the *bâ-dolo*—but never against the artisans who were always able to gain restitution of their confiscated

goods. The regime, the social mores obtaining, allowed the artisans to go directly to the prince, without fear, and complain to him. The slaves were commanded by one of their own, the infantry general, who was a pseudo-prince in that he might rule over a fief inhabited by freemen. Such was the case, in the monarchy of Cayor (Senegal), of the *djarâf Bunt Keur*, the representative of the slaves within the government and commander-in-chief of the army. His power and authority were so great that the day of his betrayal brought an end to the kingdom of Cayor. We will return to this matter, under the heading of political constitutions.

However, the ennobling of a slave, even by the king, was impossible in Africa, in contrast to the customs of European courts. Birth appeared to be something intrinsic in the eyes of this society and even the king would have been ill-advised to ennoble anyone at all, even a freeman.

The slaves of the king, by force of circumstance, thus became an element favorable to the preservation of the regime; they were a conservative element.

The slave of the mother's household was the captive of our mother, as opposed to the slave of our father. He might have been bought on the open market, come from an inheritance, or be a gift. Once established in the family he became almost an integral part of it; he was the loyal domestic, respected, feared, and consulted by the children. Due to the matriarchal and polygamous regime, we feel him closer to us, because he belongs to our mother, than the slave of the father, who is at an equal distance, socially speaking, from all the children of the same father and different mothers. As can easily be seen, the slave of the father would become the scapegoat for the society. Therefore, the slave of the mother could not be a revolutionary.

The slave of the father's household, by contrast, considering his anonymous position (our father is everyone's, so to speak, while our mother is truly our own), will be of no interest to anyone and have no special protection in society. He

may be disposed of without compensation. However, his condition is not comparable to that of the plebeian of ancient Rome, the thete of Athens, or the sudra of India. The condition of the sudra was based on a religious significance. Contact with them was considered impure; society had been structured without taking their existence into account; they could not even live in the cities nor participate in religious ceremonies, nor at the ouset have a religion of their own. We will return to this matter later. However, the alienation of the slaves of the father's household in Africa was great enough, on the moral and material plane, that their minds could be truly revolutionary. But for reasons connected to the preindustrial nature of Africa, such as the dispersion of the population into villages, for example, they could not effect a revolution. We must also add that they were really intruders in a hostile society which watched them day and night, and would never have allowed them time to plot a rebellion with their peers. It made it even less possible for them to acquire economic position and moral and intellectual education, in short, any social strength comparable to that of the bourgeoisie of the West when it overthrew the aristocracy. Slaves of this category might apparently at best have joined forces with the poor peasants, those *bâ-dolo* ("without power") whose labor actually sustained the nation more than that of the artisans.

THE BÂ-DOLO

The *bâ-dolo* by definition, were not *ñéños*, but *gérs* of modest means, doomed to the cultivation of the earth. As *gérs*, belonging to the same level as the prince, the latter found nothing dishonorable or debasing in pillaging their goods, however small they might be. Since a well-to-do *gér*, finding himself in privileged circumstances, might marry a princess, although of secondary rank to be sure, the *bâ-dolo* being a *gér* without means would have to carry the fiscal burdens of

society. Indeed, according to the African concept of honor, it was not those of inferior rank who were to be exploited, should occasion arise, but rather social equals, particularly where the latter did not have the material power to defend themselves, which was the case of the *bâ-dolo*. For reasons of this kind, the possessions of the artisan were spared. In such preindustrial, agricultural regimes, it is true, everyone was involved in the cultivation of the soil, including the king (who, according to Cailliaud, was the foremost farmer of Seennaar).[3] But on closer examination, it was the *bâ-dolo*, more than the artisans, who fed the population and constituted the majority of the laboring class.

Out of caste prejudice, however, as can easily be deduced from the preceding, they could not lower themselves so far as to form an alliance with the malcontent slaves, especially since the latter were disorganized and had no chance of success. If such an alliance had come to be in the course of African history, it would have led to a peasants' and slaves' revolt, a *jacquerie*, of the kind Egypt experienced toward the close of the Middle Kingdom, or the sort common to Western history ever since the Middle Ages—none of which was ever successful. It would have been a revolt and not a revolution such as the French (bourgeois) Revolution. But we shall see that, in precolonial Africa, the length of the periods of prosperity had nothing in common with that of the periods of dearth, which were rather exceptional and ephemeral, and that the general abundance of economic resources and the extraordinary, legendary wealth of the continent in fact foreclosed the birth and growth of any revolutionary spirit in African consciousness.

GENESIS OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

The caste system arose from a division of labor, but under an advanced political regime, which was monarchic (for one

never finds castes where there are no nobles). However, it is very probable that the specialization of labor, which led to the hereditary transmission of trades in the caste system, on a family or individual scale, evolved out of the clanic organization. If one looks at the totemic names, all those who practice the same trade, all those who belong to the same caste, are of the same totemic clan. For example, in spite of all the exogamic marriages that may have taken place after detribalization, all *Mârs* are shoemakers, belong to the same clan, and have the same totem, no matter how territorially separated they may have become. Thus, two Mârs who meet for the first time understand that they have a common clan origin.

Be that as it may, at the time of the empires of Ghana and Mali, as evidenced by the testimony of Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Battuta, and the *Tarikh es Sudan*, detribalization had already taken place throughout these great empires.

> At the time of the conquest of Northern Africa [by the Muslims], some merchants penetrated into the western part of the land of the Blacks and found among them no king more powerful than the king of Ghana. His states extended westward to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. Ghana, the capital of this strong, populous nation, was made up of two towns separated by the Niger River, and formed one of the greatest and best populated cities of the world. The author of the *Book of Roger* [Al Bakri] makes special mention of it, as does the author of *Roads and Kingdoms*.[4]

One may suppose that in a city such as Ghana, which in the tenth century was already one of the largest in the world, tribal organization had completely given way to the demands of urban life. At any rate, transmission of the individual name and inheritance, as it was practiced in the empire of Mali, according to Ibn Battuta, leaves us in no doubt about the disappearance of the tribal system in this region in 1352.

> They [the Blacks] are named after their maternal uncles, and not after their fathers; it is not the sons who inherit from their fathers, but the nephews, the sons of the father's sister. I have

never met with this last custom anywhere else, except among the infidels of Malabar in India.[5]

One fact that has not been sufficiently stressed is that the individual had a first, or given, name but not a family name before the dislocation of the clan. Theretofore, a person bore the name of the clan, but only collectively, so that when asked his name, he would always reply that he was of the clan of the Ba-Pende, Ba-Oulé, Ba-Kongo, etc. He was a member of the community, and only the dispersal of it could afford him individual existence as well as a family name, which remained then, as a sort of recall, the name of the clan. This is therefore one of the reasons we always speak of totemic names. And according to the passage cited from Ibn Battuta, we see that the individual already bore a personal family name, the name of his mother, due to the matriarchal system. This is confirmed by all the family names of important personages transmitted to us by the *Tarikh es Sudan*. This work was written by a learned Black of the sixteenth century, A.D., but relates events the most ancient of which date back to the first centuries after the birth of Christ. The same could be said of the *Tarikh el Fettach*, written in the same period, by another Black from Timbuktu [Kâti].

The stability of the caste system was assured by the hereditary transmission of social occupations, which corresponded, in a certain measure, to a monopoly disguised by a religious prohibition in order to eliminate professional competition. Indeed, religious significance was attached to the inheritance of the trade. According to the current beliefs, a subject from outside a trade, even if he acquired all the skill and science of a calling which was not that of his family, would not be able to practice it efficiently, in the mystical sense, because it was not his ancestors who concluded the initial contract with the spirit who had originally taught it to humanity. Due to an understandable tendency toward generalization, even scientific specializations to which no notions of caste are at-

tached—e.g., eye or ear medicine, etc.—are dominated by this idea. Up to this point in Africa, in the villages, a given family was specialized in the treatment of one particular part of the body only; it is interesting to note that this was also the case in ancient Egypt where, in all probability, there was originally a caste system.

CASTE IN EGYPT

There are seven classes of Egyptians, and of these some are called priests, others warriors, others herdsmen, others swineherds, others trademen, others interpreters, and, lastly, pilots; such are the classes of Egyptians; they take their names from the employments they exercise. Their warriors are called Calasiries or Hermotybies, and they are of the following districts, for all Egypt is divided into districts. The following are the districts of the Hermotybies: Busiris, Sais, Chemmis, Papremis, the island called Prosopitis, and the half of Natho. From these districts are the Hermotybies, being in number, when they are most numerous, a hundred and sixty thousand. None of these learn any mechanical art, but apply themselves wholly to military affairs. These next are the districts of the Calasiries: Thebes, Bubastis, Aphthis, Tanis, Mendes, Sebennys, Athribis, Pharbaethis, Thmuis, Onuphis, Anysis, Mycephoris; this district is situated in an island opposite the city Bubastis. These are the districts of the Calasiries, being in number, when they are most numerous, two hundred and fifty thousand men; neither are these allowed to practise any art, but they devote themselves to military pursuits alone, the son succeeding to his father.[6]

The swineherd caste alone was considered impure in Egypt, because of the prevailing religious notion concerning pork.

The Egyptians consider the pig to be an impure beast, and, therefore, if a man in passing by a pig should touch him only with his garments, he forthwith goes to the river and plunges in: and in the next place, swineherds, although native Egyptians are the only men who are not allowed to enter any of their

temples; neither will any man give his daughter in marriage to one of them, nor take a wife from among them; but the swineherds intermarry among themselves. The Egyptians, therefore, do not think it right to sacrifice swine to any other deities; but to the moon and Bacchus they do sacrifice them . . .[7]

The art of medicine is thus divided among them: each physician applies himself to one disease only, and not more. All places abound in physicians; some physicians are for the eyes, others for the head, others for the teeth, others for the parts about the belly, and others for internal disorders.[8]

One might believe that in Egypt as well clanic division corresponded, at least to some extent, with the division of labor, on the word of Herodotus. It is difficult to deny the totemic significance of the *nomes* (districts): with their local flags, they were the first geographical districts occupied by the totemic clans that progressively fused to give birth to the Egyptian nation. But even in the low period, when these territorial divisions no longer had any more than an administrative significance, there remained enough of the effects of the totemic past so that one cannot doubt its existence.

Be that as it may, as evidenced by the preceding, there was a dual bond, religious and economic, which confined each individual within his caste, except in the case of the slave who, not being a native, in reality belonged to a traditional lay category. Society had been conceived without taking his existence into account; he had been forcibly introduced into it, an intruder; a place was made for him somehow or other, without its assuming any religious significance; he was forcibly subjugated, for nothing more nor less than economic and material reasons. No metaphysical concept later arose to justify his condition, as if to ease the consciences of the citizens. We shall see that it was otherwise in India for the pariahs and for the plebeians of antiquity, where the religious systems stipulated the impurity of these inferior classes.

In Africa, slaves belonged to a hierarchy: the social condition of the masters carried over to the slaves. Slaves of a

nobleman were superior to those of a simple freeman and "gave" to the latter; and the latter in turn, if the slave of a *gér*, would "give" to the slave of an artisan; an artisan might own slaves, since he was a *gor*.

Nobles and clergy, traditional or Islamic (following the Almoravide movement of the tenth century), belong to the same caste and marry among themselves. But these nobles have the peculiarity of not being landowners, in the sense we give to this term as applied to the Middle Ages in the Western world. The land in Africa does not belong to the conquerors; the mind of the nobles is not concerned with the possession of great landed estates to be cultivated by serfs bound to the soil; in this sense there was no feudal system in Africa. This question will be treated later. In Africa, the nobility never acquired this keen sense of ownership of land. Alongside, the "conqueror," the king, there is in each village a poor old man in tatters, but respected and spared, whom the spirit of the earth is considered to have entrusted with the land. Earth is a divinity: it would be sacrilege actually to appropriate any part of it. It only lends itself to our agricultural activity, in order to make human life possible. Even during the Islamic period, i.e., up to the present day, this religious concept obscurely influences the consciousness of all Africans and it has contributed historically toward stopping or restraining tendencies to form a feudal system.

The concept of privately owned land developed only among the Lebou of the Cape Verde peninsula, as a result of the development of the great port of Dakar, after European penetration. Plots of land there were until very recently more valuable than anywhere else in what was French West Africa.

GENESIS OF THE CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

One cannot ignore the case of India, when considering the general question of caste. The notion of caste is so special

in that part of the world that a study which did not take it into account would be lacking in consistency and demonstrative vigor, as well as generality.

According to Lenormant, this type of social organization was totally alien to the Aryans and Semites. Wherever we find it, in Egypt, Babylon, Africa, or the kingdom of Malabar in India, we can be sure it is due to a southern Cushite influence.

> This system is essentially Cushite, and wherever it is found it is not difficult to establish that it stems originally from this race of people. We have seen it flourish in Babylon. The Aryas of India, who adopted it, had borrowed it from the peoples of Cush who preceded them in the Indus and Ganges basins . . ."

While this appears to have been the origin of the caste system in India, one can see the transformations that the Aryan invasions occasioned in it.

It has often been maintained, without production of any conclusive historical documents, that it was the Aryans themselves who created the caste system after having subjugated the Black aboriginal Dravidian populace. Had this been the case, the criterion of color should have been at its foundation: there should have been at most three castes, Whites, Blacks, and the gamut of crossbreeds. However, this is not the case, and in India also the castes effectively correspond to a division of labor, without any ethnic connotations. Strabo, in his *Geography*, citing a more ancient author (Megasthenes), reports that there existed in India seven castes corresponding to certain well-defined social functions: Brahmans (philosophers), Kshatriyas (warriors), Farmers, Agents of the King or Ephori (who crisscrossed the country to inform the king of what was going on), Workers and Artisans, Counselors and Courtiers, and Shepherds and Hunters.[10]

Originally the number of castes was smaller: only four, according to the *Laws of Manu*, also corresponding to a division of labor, excluding any idea of ethnic differentiation, since a Dravidian can just as well be a Brahman.

87. But in order to protect this universe He, the most resplendent one, assigned separate (duties and) occupations to those who sprang from his mouth, arms, thighs, and feet.

88. To Brâhma*n*as he assigned teaching and studying (the Veda), sacrificing for their own benefit and for others, giving and accepting (of alms).

89. The Kshatriya he commanded to protect the people, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study (the Veda), and to abstain from attaching himself to sensual pleasures;

90. The Vaisya to tend cattle, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study (the Veda), to trade, to lend money, and to cultivate land.

91. One occupation only the lord prescribed to the Sûdra, to serve meekly even these (other) three castes.[11]

Giving a divine character to property is an Aryan custom: in Rome, Greece, and India it led to the isolation from society of an entire category of individuals who had no family, had neither hearth nor home, and no right of ownership. They would everywhere constitute the class of the wretched, able to acquire wealth only after the advent of money: profane wealth, which had not been foreseen by the traditional and sacred laws regulating ownership that were made up by the ancestors of the Aryans. It was through its concern with the ownership of material goods that the Aryan spirit or genius impressed its mold upon the caste system.

In the *Laws of Manu* one can follow a meticulous description of the objects that might be possessed by such and such a class and, above all, those objects the possession of which was forbidden to the lowest class and its crossbreeds. This consciousness of material interest, this exclusivism in the domain of possession were the ideas added by the Aryans to the caste system, which at first should not have contained them in India; it would never contain them in Africa. Here it is necessary to recall all the differences between the African slave on the one hand and the plebeian or sudra on the other. The Aryans meant to effect an economic classification of society, in

India as well as in Rome and Greece, and not an ethnic separation.

51. But the dwellings of Kandâlas and Svapakas shall be outside the village, they must be made Apapâtras, and their wealth (shall be) dogs and donkeys.

52. Their dress (shall be) the garments of the dead, (they shall eat) their food from broken dishes, black iron (shall be) their ornaments, and they must always wander from place to place.

53. A man who fulfills a religious duty, shall not seek intercourse with them; their transactions (shall be) among themselves, and their marriages with their equals.

54. Their food shall be given to them by others (than an Âryan giver) in a broken dish; at night they shall not walk about in villages and in towns.

55. By day they may go about for the purpose of their work, distinguished by marks at the king's command, and they shall carry out the corpses (of persons) who have no relatives; that is a settled rule.

56. By the king's order they shall always execute the criminals, in accordance with the law, and they shall take for themselves the clothes, the beds, and the ornaments of (such) criminals.

57. A man of impure origin, who belongs not to any caste, (varna, but whose character is) not known, who, (though) not an Âryan, has the appearance of an Âryan, one may discover by his acts.[12]

This last paragraph reveals that the "untouchables" of India no more than the plebeians of Rome in principle belonged to a race different from that of the lords. Indeed, the criteria that allowed one to distinguish them were of a moral or material nature, not an ethnic one. The text further elaborates that it is in the behavior of an individual that one can discern the tendencies "unworthy of an Aryan" he inherits from parents of a base class. In the next chapter, we will study the conditions which led to the formation of this class, all of them social. We must stress that this class was totally absent

from the unaltered southern systems in which religious prohibitions might isolate a social category (e.g., the swineherds of Egypt), yet not affect it in its material interest to the point expressed in the preceding text. That is one of the fundamental differences between the African and Aryan conceptions. The swineherds of Egypt could absolutely acquire wealth in the same manner as others. They were not forbidden the possession of any goods; but since they raised an animal to which religious prejudices were attached, these prejudices redounded onto their own condition, and isolated them on a cultural plane, while leaving intact all their material interests. All the traditional prohibitions of the rest of Black Africa were of the same nature and never affected material goods. On the contrary, we can unquestionably affirm that in every such instance the possibilities of material gain on the part of subjects of the category concerned were increased by a kind of sentiment of immanent justice, a kind of compensatory spirit inherent in the society, for not only can they retain all their belongings, but they can increase their possessions by "asking" for some of others.

For these material considerations, the *Laws of Manu* tolerated a certain permeability of the caste system. They indeed provided for the case in which members of a superior class could no longer assure their existence solely by the means that religion recognized as legitimately theirs. In such a case, they provided a whole series of adaptations and accommodations.

> 83. But a Brâhma*n*a, or a Kshatriya, living by a Vaisya's mode of subsistence, shall carefully avoid (the pursuit of) agriculture, (which causes) injury to many beings and depends on others.
> 84. (Some) declare that agriculture is something excellent, (but) that means of subsistence is blamed by the virtuous; (for) the wooden (implement) with iron point injures the earth and (the beings) living in the earth.[13]

In the domain of marriage, the permeability of the caste system existed, but it was unilateral.

> 12. For the first marriage of twice-born men (wives) of equal caste are recommended; but for those who through desire proceed (to marry again) the following females, (chosen) according to the (direct) order (of the castes), are most approved.
>
> 13. It is declared that a Sûdra woman alone (can be) the wife of a Sûdra, she and one of his own caste (the wives) of a Vaisya, those two and one of his own caste (the wives) of a Kshatriya, those three and one of his own caste (the wives) of a Brâhmana.[14]

The study of the caste system in India holds a wealth of lessons: it allows one to judge the relative importance of racial, economic, and ideological factors. One can see that the Aryan race created Western materialistic and industrial technological civilization wherever the historical and economic circumstances were ripe. It is these factors which must be considered determinant, and not a peculiar set of mind in which the Aryans alone were privileged participants, conferring on them intellectual superiority over all others. Indeed, since it was a branch of this race that actually settled in Iran and India, adopting the social superstructure of the southern peoples—while adapting it—if the racial set of mind were all that counted, one might ask: Why, then, did it not create a civilization of the Western type in there countries? Economic conditions aside, the caste system of social organization assures greater permanemce and stability in society than does the system of classes created by the Aryans in Rome and in Greece—the study of which we will now begin.

NOTES

1. Were it a matter of material interest alone.
2. *Ba-dolé,* in Tuculor, means "without power." *Dolé* in Wolof refers to physical or moral strength.

3. Cailliaud, Frédéric, of Nantes, *Voyages à Méroé, au Fleuve blanc, au-delà de Fâzoql, dans le Midi du Royaume de Sennâr*. Printed by authorization of the King, at the Royal Printing Office, 1826.

4. Ibn Khaldun. *Histoire des Berbères et des dynasties musulmanes de l'Afrique Septentrionale* (trans. Baron de Slane). Algiers: Government Printshop, 1954, II, 109.

5. Ibn Battuta. *Voyage au Soudan* (trans. Baron de Slane), p. 12. See also his *Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325–1354*, H.A.R. Gibb, trans.

6. *The Histories of Herodotus* (trans. Henry Cary). New York: Appleton, 1899, Book II, Pars. 164–166.

7. *Idem*, Par. 47.   8. *Idem*, Par. 84.

9. Lenormant. *Histoire ancienne des Phéniciens*. Paris: Ed. Lévy, 1890, p. 384.

10. *The Geography of Strabo* (trans. Horace Leonard Jones). Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, Vol. VII, Book XV, 1, 67ff., Pars. 39ff.

11. *The Laws of Manu* (trans. from the Sanskrit by Georg Bühler). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1866; reprinted, New York: Dover Publications, 1969, Book I: "The Creation," 24–25, Secs. 87–91.

12. *Idem*, Book X: "Mixed Castes," 414–415, Secs. 51–57.

13. *Idem*, Book X: "Occupations of the Castes," 420–421, Secs. 83–84.

14. *Idem*, Book III: "Marriage," 14, Secs. 12–13.

Chapter Two

SOCIO-POLITICAL EVOLUTION
OF THE ANCIENT CITY

SOCIAL CLASSES

The facts hereafter related are essentially taken from *The Ancient City* by Fustel de Coulanges. As Grenier remarks in his *Les religions étrusque et romaine* (The Etruscan and Roman Religions), Fustel de Coulanges's work remains the authority. At most, perhaps might one reverse the order of the factors and, contrarily to what he said, explain the religious ideological superstructure by the economic living conditions. But even on this point, it must be recognized that his thought is extremely subtle; for some developments he clearly seems to give precedence to the living conditions.

Originally there were two classes in Greco-Roman society:

Athens:	Eupatridae and Thetes;
Sparta:	Equals and Inferiors;
Rome:	Patricians and Plebeians.

EUPATRIDAE

This first class is that of the "haves." From the very beginning, property had had a divine character and only members of this class could possess the land in the sacred sense of the term. They alone, having ancestors, could have a domestic cult and a god, without which one had no political, judicial, or religious personality and was thus "impure," a

plebeian. They alone knew the sacred rites, the prayers which for a long time had remained unwritten and were transmitted orally from father to son. Superstition and conservatism were inherent in them: they alone had an interest in maintaining the order established by their ancestors. If a priest introduced into the cult the slightest innovation, he was punished with death.

Thus it is not this class that was responsible for the progressive profanation of religion and the body of traditional beliefs, a profanation inseparable from what we have come to call Greek secular and rational thought. This was the work of the plebs. The owning class alone was patriotic since only it had a "patria," i.e., freedom of the city, while the plebs, without hearth or home, were restricted to the outside or the low parts of the cities, like the untouchables of India. Patriotism, so characteristic of Greco-Roman antiquity, is explained by the fact that society had not allowed for the foreigner, who thereby became enemy number one, without rights, who might be killed with impunity and whose very eyes made the holy objects impure. He was punished with death if he touched a tomb or entered a sacred place. He could protect his life only by voluntarily becoming the slave of a citizen of the city: hence, the class of clients. One can understand why men would defend to the last drop of their blood their city, outside of which they were vile, impure beings, untouchables, worthy at best of slavery. Thus patriotism sprang from the very structure of society. At the start, it did not reflect a sentiment of purely national pride, as was the case in Egypt.

Religious egotism—the gods were first and foremost domestic property—was an obstacle to the existence of a national territory more extensive than the city: houses might not even touch one another, the connecting wall being a sacrilege in antiquity. Even in death, families were not commingled. The boundaries of fields were sacred: the Terminus gods.

Primogeniture, which prevailed, produced among the eu-

patridae the unprivileged and discontented class of cadets (or younger sons): they would in the end revolt in various cities in order to abolish primogeniture and paternal authority.

THE PLEBS

The lowest class, the plebs, was made up of all those whose hearths had gone out, fatherless children or bastards, onetime clients who now felt freer among the plebs. These could possess no land, married without sacred rites, in other words, profanely, had no sacred prayers, no religion: this is why they were the ones to trample upon tradition and liberate society from its ultra-conservative changelessness, which might otherwise have survived up to our time. In their alienation without any compensation whatsoever, as against the golden rule of African societies, is where we may look for the deeper causes of the transformations and revolutions of the society of antiquity, when they had become the numerically predominant element of the people. The different phases of these revolutions will now be described.

PRIEST-KINGS

At first there existed confusion between priesthood and civil power. The king of the city was at the same time priest, magistrate, and military chief. But kingship was never hereditary in Rome. Kings did not need military force to command obedience: they had neither armies, nor finances, nor police. The confusion of religious and political authority did not end with royalty; the magistrate of the Republic was also a priest: he was designated by rite, that is, by the drawing of lots in Athens. Thus the people had the impression of receiving their magistrates from the gods who had caused them to be so

designated. They did not seek the most courageous one, nor the one with the greatest military aptitude or best suited to be chief of state, to invest with power: rather, the man best loved of the gods. All of domestic and political life was dominated by almost unimaginable superstition: a sneeze could cause an undertaking to be stopped; the Senate might meet to make the gravest decisions concerning the security of the city, yet disperse at once when a sign of evil omen appeared. Acts performed with imperfect rites were worthless. As Fustel de Coulanges points out, only at the time of Cicero did people begin not to live their religion, but use it as a political expedient. It was useful to the government, but by then religion was already dead in the people's souls.[1]

THE CITY-STATE

The Aryans, as long as they were relatively isolated in their northern cradle, never had the ability to conceive of a political, judicial, and social state organization extending beyond the limits of the city. The notion of state as a "territory" comprising several cities or that of empire without question came to them from the southern world, and in particular from the example of Egypt.

> Two facts we can easily understand: first, that this religion, peculiar to each city, must have established the city in a very strong and almost unchangeable manner; it is, indeed, marvelous how long this social organization lasted, in spite of all its faults and all its chances of ruin; second, that the effect of this religion, during long ages, must have been to render it impossible to establish any other social form than the city.
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> Every city, even by the requirements of its religion, was independent. It was necessary that each should have its particular code, since each had its own religion, and the law flowed from the religion. Each was required to have its sovereign tribunal, and there could be no judicial tribunal superior to that

of the city. Each had its religious festivals and its calendar; the months and the year could not be the same in two cities, as the series of religious acts was different. Each had its own money, which at first was marked with its religious emblem. Each had its weights and measures. It was not admitted that there could be anything common between two cities. The line of demarcation was so profound that one hardly imagined marriage possible between the inhabitants of two different cities. Such a union always appeared strange, and was long considered illegal. The legislation of Rome and that of Athens were visibly averse to admitting it. Nearly everywhere children born of such a marriage were confounded with bastards, and deprived of the rights of citizens . . .

In ancient times there was something more impassable than mountains between two neighboring cities, there were the series of sacred bounds, the difference of worship, and the hatred of the gods towards the foreigner.

For this reason the ancients were never able to establish, or even to conceive of, any other social organization than the city. Neither the Greeks, nor the Latins, nor even the Romans, for a very long time, ever had a thought that several cities might be united, and live on an equal footing under the same government. There might, indeed, be an alliance, or a temporary association, in view of some advantage to be gained, or some danger to be repelled; but there was never a complete union; for religion made of every city a body which could never be joined to another. Isolation was the law of the city.[2]

Under these conditions the annexation of a city or a neighboring territory was unthinkable: one could not govern a conquered city because one was a foreigner in the eyes of its gods. One might massacre the population or deport it in its entirety to be sold. One pillaged towns but always returned home. There could be no question of settling conquered populations on one's own territory and giving them residency, as Merneptah, a Pharaoh of the Nineteenth Dynasty and other Pharaohs of Egypt had done with Aryan peoples each time they conquered them.

Colonization rather had a religious character. The

younger branches without inheritance lighted a torch in the city hearth so as to found another on virgin soil. Thus were founded by Athenian families the dozen towns of Ionia in which for a long time they preserved the priesthood and political power from father to son. Athens was the mother city to these twelve towns which were its "colonies." As can be seen, the bond was purely religious and Athens did not claim in any way to exercise the least political control over the life of these cities. Nevertheless, because of economic necessities, confederations were finally formed to group cities together in a very loose bond. Such were, in particular, the commercial federations of Delos, Thermopylae, Calauria, and Delphi. However, according to Fustel de Coulanges, these associations were for a long time of purely religious significance and it was only under Philip of Macedon that the Amphictyons, as they were called, began to be concerned with political affairs.

INDIVIDUALISM

The individual was totally subordinate to the city. The dictatorship of the city was absolute on people's consciences. Once its power became established, the city-state became responsible for the rearing of the children in the place of the father of the family. It even regulated clothing, the wearing of beards by men, the adornment of women, and went so far as to dictate the sentiments that one should show.

> Sparta had just suffered a defeat at Leuctra, and many of its citizens had perished. On the receipt of this news, the relatives of the dead had to show themselves in public with gay countenances. The mother who learned that her son had escaped, and that she should see him again, appeared afflicted and wept. Another, who knew that she should never again see her son, appeared joyous, and went around to the temple to thank the gods. What, then, was the power of the state that could thus order the reversal of the natural sentiments, and be obeyed?[3]

We perceive here one of the causes of Western individualism as opposed to African collectivism. It has often been spoken about without minutely examining how it originated. So, let us inspect the facts available to our analysis. The families of different citizens constituting the city were separate cells, so independent that it was sacrilege for the houses to touch one another, these feelings of independence going back to life on the steppes. But each individual, each family head, each citizen was directly riveted to the dictatorial state by a bond of bronze. The day when this gave way, we would progressively see individuals attempting once again to become absolutely separate, for they had not learned to develop a communal civil life. In contrast, in Africa, the power of the state, although centralized from Egypt to the rest of Black Africa, never subjugated the consciences of citizens in so strong a way. The Pharaoh, considered by Moret to be the most powerful moral figure that ever existed, never dreamed of controlling the sentiments or the dress of his people; the individual always felt dependent upon the state and socially speaking upon his peers within community life. In Africa, there always existed a reciprocal invasion of consciences and individual liberties. In other words, each one felt that he had material and moral rights upon the personalities of others and that they reciprocally had rights on him. This held throughout all political regimes. Even today, on a superficial level the African may display a spirit of independence toward the community; but he is hardly likely to grasp the gap which separates the Western individual from the group.

ARISTOCRATIC REVOLUTION

Turning back to the political regimes of the city-states and following their development, one finds that their legitimacy was questioned as early as the seventh century B.C. The coinci-

dence of the priesthood with political power created a grave problem. The aristocracy formed by the Eupatridae found it to its advantage to disassociate the two factors, leaving in the hands of the king the symbolic ritual and the priesthood, while retaining for itself the political power. A revolution therefore had to break out, a first revolution of only a political but no social character.

> The kings wished to be powerful, and the *patres* preferred that they should not be. A struggle then commenced in all the cities, between the aristocracy and the kings.
> Everywhere the issue of the struggle was the same. Royalty was vanquished. But we must not forget that this primitive royalty was sacred. The king was the man who pronounced the prayers, who offered the sacrifice, who had, in fine, by hereditary right, the power to call down upon the city the protection of the gods. Men could not think, therefore, of doing away with the king; one was necessary to their religion; one was necessary to the safety of the city. . . .
> Plutarch [writes]: "As the kings displayed pride and rigor in their commands, the greater part of the Greeks took away their power, and left them only the care of religion."[4]

What was then seen was a curious phenomenon: the kings, kept in place by religion, trampled it as much as they could, for it was the very thing that gave strength to the Eupatridae, the aristocracy. The latter derived all their power from the ancestral religious tradition. The kings then called upon the secular plebeian majority, who were not part of the population, which included only the citizens and the clients. This was what was done by the first seven kings of Rome. Servius, through a series of laws, improved the lot of the plebs, giving them conquered lands which they might own in fact, if not by ritual.

The victory of the Eupatridae was consecrated by the reform of Lycurgus:

> Lycurgus had for a moment the power to supress royalty: he took good care not to do this, judging that royalty was

necessary, and the royal family inviolable. But he arranged so that the kings were henceforth subordinate to the senate in whatever concerned the government, and that they were no longer anything more than presidents of this assembly, and the executors of its decrees. A century later, royalty was still farther weakened; the executive power was taken away and was entrusted to annual magistrates, who were called *ephors*.[5]

For four centuries, from Codrus to Solon, the Eupatridae governed the city without there having been any striking political events: their authority appeared legitimate throughout this entire period when they were the only ones to know and to transmit the sacred unwritten formulas from father to son. The life of the city, properly speaking, declined because urban activity was incompatible with the patriarchal style of life of the Eupatridae who, after their victory over royalty, all went back to living on their country estates, surrounded by servants: this was a kind of feudal system, in view of the weakening of royal power. There were assemblies in the city only periodically for religious services. Society was steeped in the aristocratic spirit, as evidenced by the importance attached to noble birth. The praise heaped upon members of a noble family within the framework of epic poetry was quite identical to that expressed by African griots.

SOCIAL REVOLUTION

The aristocratic revolution modified the external form of government but not the social structure: the political revolution had forestalled a social and domestic one. However, the latter was not slow in coming: the *gens* came apart as the right of primogeniture disappeared in the wake of the revolt of the younger branches in the cities. The clients peaceably broke away in the course of a long domestic struggle.

At Heraclea, Cnidus, Istros, and Marseilles the younger branches took up arms to destroy at the same time the right of primogeniture and the paternal authority.[6]

True, we do not find in the history of any city mention made of a general insurrection among this class. If there were armed struggles, they were shut up and concealed within the circle of each family. For more than one generation there were on one side energetic efforts for independence, and implacable repression on the other. There took place in each house a long and dramatic series of events which it is impossible to-day to retrace. All that we can say is, that the efforts of the lower classes were not without results. An invincible necessity obliged the masters, little by little, to relinquish some of their omnipotence.[7]

The client, who in some respects could be compared to the slave of the mother's household in Africa, finally disappeared in Athens. This was the result of the legislative work of Solon, who first took a trip to Egypt to draw inspiration from the laws of that country. Before him a client might be sold to pay off a debt and could not own land because of the "sacred boundaries" which institutionalized the ritual ownership by the patron of the soil he cultivated. Solon, according to the time-honored expression, "overturned the sacred boundaries," thus allowing poor peasants to become landowners. He forbade the bonding of oneself to pay off a debt.

The creation of the tribunal, for the defense of the plebs, promoted its unity with the clientele, which then felt secure and freer to fight for its rights. Clientship became voluntary and contractual, as with the "class" of *navetanes* of Black Africa.

Henceforth, there were only two classes: on the one hand, the owners who formed the ruling aristocracy, on the other, the landless of all sorts, comprising both the plebs and the former clientele. All the political and social contradictions being laid bare, a veritable class struggle, harsh and long, was to take place.

Under the aristocracy, plebs and people had regretted the time of the kings, which they considered retrospectively as a Golden Age. At its outbreak, the struggle consisted in strengthening the royalty against the aristocracy, then, from

the sixth century on, the people began to take leaders belonging to the master class (lords), but without the sacrosanct character of royalty, who were called tyrants. As Fustel de Coulanges noted, this was an event of supreme importance to the extent that it consecrated, for the first time in ancient history, the obedience of man to man and not that of man to a divinity through an individual.

> When the kings had been everywhere overthrown, and the aristocracy had become supreme, the people did not content themselves with regretting the monarchy; they aspired to restore it under a new form. In Greece, during the sixth century, they succeeded generally in procuring leaders; not wishing to call them kings, because this title implied the idea of religious functions, and could only be borne by the sacerdotal families, they called them tyrants.[8]

The invention of money by the Lydians in the sixth century, the progress of commerce, and the new conditions of war allowed the plebs to grow rich and acquire importance. Money was not sacred, anyone might own it, including plebeians, religious tradition not yet having had time to put its stamp upon it. Commerce was no longer forbidden to anyone either: it grew fantastically as Athens looked out toward the sea. Henceforth the plebs entered the army and contributed men to the infantry and the navy; naval operations became progressively more frequent, significant, and decisive than the former land battles which were marked by the chivalry of the patricians, whose members alone were rich enough to afford the necessary armor. The state did not furnish it as it does today. The aristocracy by definition was idle: the manual workers, the artisans were not as in Black Africa free men, belonging to castes, but slaves. As the plebs grew richer and entered into the towns—from which until then they had been excluded—they acquired a faith of their own by adopting foreign beliefs (Egyptian and Asiatic divinities), while gradually the aristocracy became pauperized. The plebs had its own

bourgeoisie, its intellectuals, its politicians, its tyrants now emerged from its own ranks and no longer from that of the Eupatridae: they became real tyrants of the people. The real concern of the plebs, as we can see, was not so much to build a regime radically different from that of the aristocracy which had oppressed them, but to become as much as possible like this class by setting up all the institutions and customs they had lacked to be comparable to it.

There then took place a new phenomenon which resembles modern times: a veritable money class having been created, the plebs turned into a financial bourgeoisie and the Eupatridae, like the nobles of the industrial age, married money in the person of a plebeian heiress. Hence a witticism of the times: "What is this man's lineage?"—"He married money!"

When once the lower classes had gained these points; when they had among themselves rich men, soldiers, and priests; when they had gained all that gave man a sense of his own worth and strength; when, in fine, they had compelled the aristocracy to consider them of some account, it was impossible to keep them out of social and political life, and the city could be closed to them no longer.

The entry of this inferior class into the city was a revolution, which from the seventh to the fifth century filled the history of Greece and Italy.

The efforts of the people were everywhere successful, but not everywhere in the same manner, or by the same means. In some cases the people, as soon as they felt themselves to be strong, rose, sword in hand, and forced the gates of the city where they had been forbidden to live. Once masters, they either drove out the nobles and occupied their houses, or contented themselves with proclaiming an equality of rights. This is what happened at Syracuse, at Erythrae, and at Miletus.[9]

Solon's reform coincided with the triumph of the people: it was of a political and social nature. That of Cleisthenes was

of a religious nature: its purpose was to give a faith to all those who had none, merely by geographically splitting up the urban population. As against these two legislations, Draco's, which preceded Solon's by thirty years, was drawn up at a time when the Eupatridae had not yet been conquered. It was thus only a more or less precise codification of the interests of that class.

But the poor class was not slow in reacting and naming Pisistratus as dictator. Henceforth the public interest would replace the oldtime religion, universal suffrage would become the form of government, and Athenian democracy would undergo its effects: the unemployed sold their votes in broad daylight and a series of laws was established often confiscating the wealth of the rich. It was a kind of prefiguration of the time of the sharers. Democracy was to suffer from these political blunders to the benefit of the tyrants of the people.

MOVEMENTS OF IDEAS

At that same time, philosophical ideas began to have an effect in the political arena.

> Then philosophy appeared, and overthrew all the rules of the ancient polity. It was impossible to touch the opinions of men without also touching the fundamental principles of their government. Pythagoras, having a vague conception of the Supreme Being, disdained the local worships; and this was sufficient to cause him to reject the old modes of government, and to attempt to found a new order of society.[10]

The ideas of Anaxagoras, of the Sophists who followed, those of Socrates, Plato, and Zeno contributed powerfully to broadening governmental conceptions, and to adapting them to current conditions, rather than allowing them to follow a series of ossified ancestral formulas, no longer meeting any need. Socrates contributed to freeing morals from religions, placing justice above law, and making conscience the guide of

man. In this, without meaning to, he opposed the tradition of the city, resulting in the supreme penalty to him.

Anaxagoras had the idea of a God whose principle is pure intelligence; it is He who governs our consciences. He therefore rejected the religious formalism of his time by avoiding assemblies as much as possible and refusing political duties.

The Sophists had great merit not in developing a precise and explicit political philosophy, but in disturbing tradition by questioning it and discussing it publicly. Taste for the dialectic little by little came into existence and people acquired the habit of discussing everything instead of passively accepting ready-made formulas. But until Plato even the boldest of Greek thinkers were not able to go beyond the concept of the city-state; at most they tried to give this framework a new internal structure: Plato's Republic is a City.

It seems that it was Zeno, with the Stoic school, who, having conceived the idea of a universal God, first spread the concept of a government which would bring all men together.

> We see from this how far ideas had advanced since the age of Socrates, who thought himself bound to adore, as far as he was able, the gods of the state. Even Plato did not plan any other government than that of a city. Zeno passed beyond these narrow limits of human associations. He disdained the divisions which the religions of ancient ages had established. As he believed in a God of the universe, so he had also the idea of a State into which the whole human race should enter. . . .
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> Higher ideas prompted men to form more extensive societies. They were attracted towards unity . . .[11]

THE INFLUENCE OF EGYPT

Without any doubt, these universalist ideas derived from the southern world and in particular from Egypt. A thousand years before the Greek thinkers, Socrates, Plato, Zeno, etc., the Egyptians, with the reform of Amenophis IV, had clearly

conceived the idea of a universal God responsible for creation, whom all men, without distinction, could adore: He was not the God of any particular tribe, nor of any city, or even any nation, but indeed the God of all humankind.

These conceptions which Christianity later adopted were not originally a part of it, it seems. It first appeared as a Jewish sect, dependent on Judaism. It was only after Saint Paul had been ill received by the "Jews" that he turned toward the pagans to convert them. Christianity then became the religion of everyone, instead of being that of a given tribe chosen by God. If it was able to triumph over the other Eastern faiths which coexisted with it in Rome, it was not by its moral superiority, but probably because its first adepts, having been distrusted and sometimes accused of political dissidence (Saint Paul overtly opposed the cult of the Emperor and predicted the end of temporal rule), were treated as martyrs: they were thrown to the wild beasts or beheaded. It was the moral benefit of this repression which Christianity alone suffered that contributed to assuring its triumph over the other faiths which were liturgically better established and morally even more elevated. One cannot too strongly emphasize all that primitive Christianity borrowed from the cult of Isis in Rome, even in the structure of its processions. "Egypt is the country from which contemplative devotion penetrated into Europe."[12]

Concerning the religion of Isis and Osiris the same author wrote: "No religion had yet brought to men so formal a promise of immortality: this above all gave to the Alexandrian mysteries [of Isis] their power of attraction."[13]

We know that Christianity shortly made these conceptions of resurrection and immortality its own.

These foreign religions which made no distinctions among individuals often allowed the disinherited of the plebs to worship. Here again the broadening of religious consciousness manifestly came from the outside. The love of one's neighbor was a moral commonplace in the southern world:

this notion could represent an advance in morals only in the individualistic northern Mediterranean.

> The Oriental worships, which began in the sixth century to overrun Greece and Italy, were eagerly received by the plebs; these were forms of worship which, like Buddhism,[14] excluded no caste, or people.[15]

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Such then were the political and religious ideas which were to permit Rome, allowing for economic conditions, to destroy the municipal regime and establish the empire.

At the time of the Peloponnesian War, it had been seen that in all the cities the poor were partisans of Athens and the rich of Sparta. Depending on which faction was victorious in a given city, it became a vassal of Sparta or Athens. Ancient society thus was already divided into two clearly distinct classes, the haves and the have-nots. Their struggle had pushed urban nationalism into the background. It was this situation which in large part allowed the Roman city, so well equipped and enriched by commerce, to conquer the Mediterranean basin.

According to Fustel de Coulanges, Rome was considered a city where a Senate composed of rich patricians governed to the exclusion of the wretched subjugated populace. This idea exerted a very strong influence on the ruling aristocracies of other Mediterranean cities troubled by the class struggle. Therefore at the time of the Roman conquest many of them offered only a semblance of resistance; many declared themselves open cities and their Senates purely and simply turned their cities over to Rome. Such was the course of events that led to the establishment of the Roman Empire.

> Municipal patriotism thus became weakened and died out in men's minds. Every man's opinion was more precious to him

than his country, and the triumph of his faction became much dearer to him than the grandeur or glory of his city. [16]

At Ardea, the aristocracy and the plebs being at enmity, the plebs called the Volscians to their aid, and the aristocracy delivered the city to the Romans. [17]

NOTES

1. Fustel de Coulanges, *La Cité antique* (Paris: Hachette, 1930), p. 257.
2. Fustel de Coulanges, Numa Denis, *The Ancient City* (trans. Willard Small, 1873), (New York: Doubleday Anchor reprint ed., n.d.), pp. 201–203. (This and all succeeding quotations from this work are from this edition.)
3. *Id.*, p. 221.   4. *Id.*, p. 235–236.   5. *Id.*, p. 237.   6. *Id.*, p. 253.
7. *Id.*, p. 259.   8. *Id.*, pp. 270–271.   9. *Id.*, pp. 275–276.   10. *Id.*, p. 355.
11. *Id.*, pp. 358–360.
12. Grenier, *Les Religions étrusque et romaine* (Paris: Ed. P.U.F., Coll. Mana, 1948), tome 3, p. 208.
13. *Id.*, p. 209.
14. Buddhism, by its non-exclusivist character, could not be an Indo-European religious creation.
15. Fustel de Coulanges, *op. cit.*, p. 275.
16. *Id.*, p. 368.   17. *Id.*, p. 370 (citing Livy, VIII, 11.).

Chapter Three

FORMATION OF THE MODERN EUROPEAN STATES

The end of antiquity coincided with the triumph of Christianity. The latter in its hierarchical organization bore the imprint of the temporal organization of the Roman empire: bishoprics, dioceses, etc., which corresponded to the Roman administrative divisions. The bishop of the capital, Rome, was also to have special importance and become Pope. The memory of the Roman empire, perpetuated by the church, is what constantly impelled the barbarian kings to try to rebuild a universal Christian empire. During the High Middle Ages there was true intellectual regression; the West was no longer able to carry forward the achievements of antiquity. This was especially striking in the domain of sculpture and architecture. The culture and knowledge achieved in antiquity vegetated in the monasteries, to emerge from them beginning in the thirteenth century. During this period, the Church played a positive role in social and intellectual development and in the tempering of behavior.

After the failure of the universal empire, national states grew up with the Great Discoveries, the diffusion of ideas, the existence of an insatiable international market for goods, as a consequence of the Portguese, Spanish, Dutch, and Norman geographical expeditions.

The West was technically less advanced than the East. It was able to overcome its inferiority only with the help of the Arabs who, beginning in the seventh century, wherever they moved spread the achievements of antiquity which had vege-

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tated in Byzantium. Through their philosophers Avicenna and Averroes, Aristotle became known and discussed in the West. They introduced advanced metallurgy (the steelworks of Toledo, Spain). They also introduced the navigator's compass, gunpowder, the use of naval maps, and perhaps the axial helm which made possible the exact determination of a ship's position. Coasting was no longer necessary and long-distance sailing with high-side ships came in. In chemistry and mathematics they also introduced much knowledge derived from the East.

The fact that Spain was the first European country to acquire technical supremacy at the dawn of modern times and for a certain period dominate the world can be explained only by the Arab contribution during the time of its colonization. These two facts are not generally connected as closely as they should be.

In brief, the Catholic Church on one hand, Islam on the other, were the great preservers of the knowledge of antiquity and contributed greatly, over different geographical routes, during the Middle Ages to the transmission of this knowledge to the new modern nations about to emerge.

From the social point of view, the Middle Ages would see the rise of a bourgeois class alongside the wretched serfs. The situations of the serf, the plebeian, and the slave of the father's household were to a certain extent comparable except as concerns their numbers and concentrations. Those of the bourgeois and the African man of caste were not in any way comparable: the former was a once-exploited freedman with a conscience full of revolutionary germs driving toward transformation, whereas the latter was in essence conservative.

THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL MIDDLE AGES

The Western Empire had been dismembered in the sixth century. There followed a period of chaos and barbarism; in

511, Clovis created the Frankish kingdom with the support of the church. His descendants became the Do-Nothing Kings, the last of whom was eliminated by the Mayor of his Palace: Pépin the Short was crowned and consecrated by the Pope. This was the origin of the sacrosanct royalty of the West, which was to last until the Revolution. Charlemagne was crowned in the year 800. He created the Holy Roman Empire, provided it with a strong centralized administrative organization, and began a movement of rebirth in the arts, literature, and science. His tutor Alcuin played a key role in the unearthing and diffusing of the knowledge of antiquity, especially through his commentary on the works of Aristotle. The transmission to modern man of the Trivium (dialects, rhetoric, grammar) and the Quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music) was thus assured.

The three grandsons of Charlemagne divided the empire among themselves after his death, since succession to the throne was not yet regulated by any precise tradition. Each kingdom would then start to grow weaker and weaker and finally break apart. In the tenth century, invasions by new barbarians (Normans, Hungarians, etc.) threw Europe into a time of anarchy and political weakness. Most of the kings had only a title without power, and could no longer assure the security of their subjects. This situation forced the subjects to mass around local chiefs strong enough to protect them. The feudal regime was to be born: The lord who would set himself up on a territory, having constructed on it a fortress of either wood or stone capable of protecting the neighboring peasants in case of invasion, would become their real chief, and relationships of dependency would become established, the details of which we will examine.

André Ribard in his book, the only work of Marxist synthesis published in France in the domain of history [as of 1960], gives a rigorous analysis of the formation of this feudal system:

Authority in Europe had not ceased to crumble—kings remained but no states. Too far removed from the immediate peril to be effective against invaders, monarchal power no longer constituted a true central government. The notion of the state was eclipsed by that of security. Populations concentrated at spots favorable for resistance. Escaping from pillage alone was the castle where people and flocks could take refuge while its armed men scoured the countryside in the name of the lord. When the village could no longer be defended, it was abandoned. So this society had to be reorganized around the fortified castle. The effectiveness of the castle dictated a new hierarchy in which the king was merely the nominal suzerain, the essential part being the military caste of lords who decentralized power to their own advantage.

Each man put his trust in one more powerful than he; these bonds of vassalage wove a system of protection and servitude in which the lord was quickly tempted to abuse his authority—danger would often come from the protector himself. A slow historic gestation thus led to a coherent system: feudalism. Its greatest flowering was in France, thick with wooden castle-keeps, battle command posts for military units split up by regions, to fend off the Scandinavian pirates whose penetration was so deep that they supplied the naval terminology of the French language. This organization was just as good as the lord over it: it really assured some security only if he was courageous and well equipped with men and horses. When during two or three generations the same family had devoted itself to this permanent guerrilla warfare, the feudal lord became the suzerain of a number of territories in which, bound together by innumerable traditions of Christian, Germanic, Celtic, or Roman origin, these vassals paid their tributes to him—military service in the case of his companions, agricultural labor in the case of the peasants. These privileged ones had only to fight. They succeeded so well in enriching themselves that the monarchy, whose wealth lay only in landed estates, rapidly saw these dwindle. Forced to transfer ever more estates over to these feudal lords, royalty became pauperized: when it ran out of estates to give, it would no longer be able to command—the feudal system would have devoured its authority. What was left

to the monarchy was only the theory of its existence, the fact that it was consecrated and that its rank was still called the first.

As for the people, they worked: they fed those who were supposed to protect them and whose exactions had now taken a legal turn; the peasants themselves, their families, and their beasts, had to foot the bill. Man was free, but subject to so many kinds of tributes that his fate would remain atrocious, for it had become hereditary. . . .

The constant dangers threatening this society, its poorly upkept roads, the concentration of population, the isolation of markets guaranteed the stability of the new system: its Law would entrench itself, as would its terms, its customs, and its morals.[1]

The feudal lords invented a series of imposts which became more and more oppressive, as much for free peasants (freeholders) as for serfs who were bound to the land. The latter could be sold with the land, and could transmit nothing by heredity to their descendants, except their condition. When several lords held rights to the same land, they divided among themselves the children of the serfs who cultivated it. Marriage was dependent on the will of the lord whose permission had to obtained.[2] All the apparatus needed for domestic life (mill, oven, etc.) was located at the castle. All the subjects of the lord's domain were required to go and make use of them and pay for the privilege. The technique of the feudal system of exploitation, by its exceptionally inhumane character, explains both the *jacqueries* which marked the Middle Ages and the drive with which the inhabitants of the burgs, better concentrated, were to organize in order to wrest political and economic liberty from the lords. Commerce which was in full bloom (markets, fairs) allowed the artisans and merchants of the cities, despite the condition of the roads, to gain enormous riches.

When the lords fell into debt following the Crusades, they would be more and more obliged to sell some of the

political and economic liberties to their subjects: Communes would buy their political autonomy and form commercial confederations, such as the Hanseatic League which grouped nearly eighty German towns with Hamburg as their center. Thus was born the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie which by developing, organizing, and gaining education, would become the preponderant political and economic element of the European society that in short order it would control. Born in shackles and out of struggle, this bourgeoisie had to become essentially revolutionary and lay-minded.

THE INTELLECTUAL MIDDLE AGES

The period of the Middle Ages has been considered in European history as a relatively barbarous epoch of transition during which the achievements of antiquity were absolutely lost. Most certainly, knowledge regressed enormously, but the guiding thread was never totally cut and, as early as the time of Charlemagne, the knowledge which had vegetated in the monasteries began to come out. This intellectual movement, which spread from Ireland and England over the entire continent, is undeniable evidence of intellectual continuity. As the Turks occupied Constantinople, destroying the Eastern Empire, and Greek scholars fled to the West, this intellectual movement gained momentum. The Greek writers who had already been given an introduction by the Arabs were now more widely available. We have seen that thanks to Avicenna and Averroes Aristotle's *Logic* was known and discussed. The intellectual influence of Aristotle, the only Greek philosopher to be studied, was considerable on the thinkers of the Middle Ages. His authority was almost sacrosanct: thanks to him, they little by little familiarized themselves with the rational, scientific manner of thinking. His physics helped the more enlightened minds to grasp the idea of positive science divorced from religion.

Paul Vignaux has pointed out Alcuin's keen awareness of the ties that united his own time to scholarly antiquity.

> His praise of the sovereign [Charlemagne] in another letter defines Alcuin's ideal for us: to build in France a new Athens, superior to the earlier one, because taught by Christ. Led by Plato, the earlier one shone with the seven liberal arts. . . .
>
> These liberal arts were the culture to be transmitted. Eighty years after the death of Alcuin, one chronicler judged his work a success; the moderns, whether Gauls or Franks, seemed to him the equals of the ancients of Rome and Athens. Chrétien de Troyes was likewise to express the continuity of civilization. . . .
>
> At the end of the twelfth century, Paris would seem the new Athens.[3]

In the thirteenth century, following Alhazen, the philosophical school of Oxford with Grosseteste and Roger Bacon clearly conceived the idea of positive physico-mathematical science.

> The disciple [Bacon, the disciple of Grosseteste] realized that his master had not followed the path laid out by Aristotle, that having known mathematics and optics, he might have known everything. The mathematicism of Roger Bacon is the sense of *potestas mathematicae*—the ability of this type of knowledge to discipline the mind and explain nature.[4]

In *Le Nombre d'Or* (The Golden Number), Matila Ghyka demonstrated how vast was the influence of antiquity on the esthetic and architectural conceptions of the Renaissance.[5]

In these last two chapters we have rapidly reviewed the politico-social evolution of the European states from antiquity to the formation of the modern nations. The time has come to undertake a detailed comparative study of African politico-social organizations.

NOTES

1. André Ribard, *La prodigieuse histoire de l'humanité* (Paris: Ed. du Myrte, Collection "Pour comprendre l'histoire," 1947), pp. 228–229.

2. So, following Fustel de Coulanges, we must see serfdom and slavery as
   one.
3. Paul Vignaux, *La Pensée au Moyen Age* (Paris: Lib. A. Colin, Collection Armand Colin, 1938), p. 12.
4. *Idem.*, p. 91.
5. Matila Ghyka, *Le Nombre d'Or: Rites et rythmes pythagoriciens dans le développement de la civilisation européenne* (Paris: Gallimard, new ed., 1976).

Chapter Four

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION IN BLACK AFRICA

The political organization the principles of which we are about to consider is the one which, give or take a few variants, seemingly governed the African states from the first to the nineteenth century. This is what we may assume from the testimony of Al Bakri and Ibn Khaldun concerning the Empire of Ghana (tenth and eleventh centuries) and, more recently, of Battuta on the Empire of Mali (1352–53).

Ghana, Mali, and Songhai were very shortly to become Islamized, beginning in the tenth century, under the influence of the Almoravide movement. In order to come closer to historical truth it seems necessary to take as frame of reference, as example for study, the constitution of an African state contemporary with these, with a parallel history, but which, because of its southern location (Burkina-Faso of today), was not overrun by Islam. It will thus be possible to bring out the modifications of political structure due to external influences.

CONSTITUTION

Mossi is a constitutional monarchy. The emperor, the Moro Naba, comes by heredity from the family of the previous Moro Naba (eleventh century probably), but his nomination is not automatic. He is chosen by an "electoral" college of four dignitaries, presided over by the Prime Minister, the togo

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naba, as in Ethiopia.[1] He is actually invested with power by the latter who, however, is not a Nakomsé (nobleman), but comes from an ordinary family, and who is, in reality, the representative of the people, of all free men, all the citizens who constitute the Mossi nation.

The emperor is assisted, in addition to the Prime Minister, by three others: the rassam naba, the balum naba, and the kidiranga naba. Each of them governs one region in addition to his more or less specialized functions. The togo naba is in charge of four royal districts: Tziga, Sissamba, Somniaga, and Bissigaï. The togo nabas basically come in turn from three families of commoners residing respectively at Toïsi, Kierga, and Nodé.

After the Prime Minister in order of importance comes the rassam naba or bingo naba, chief of the slaves of the Crown. He is also the Minister of Finances, guardian of the treasury of precious objects, cowries (coin), bracelets, etc. He is the High Executioner, when occasion arises putting to death condemned criminals. He is chief of the blacksmiths and governs them through interposition of the saba naba. He governs the canton of Kindighi. Therefore, although himself a slave, the rassam naba rules over free men, and holds power over full-fledged citizens. We will find the same practice among the Wolofs of Cayor Baol and the Serers of Sine Salum in Senegal.

The balum naba is third in rank: he is Mayor of the Palace, in charge of introducing ambassadors and distinguished visitors. He administers the Zitinga, the Bussu, and the Gursi.

The kidiranga naba, head of the cavalry, comes from one of three ordinary Mossi families.

The rassam naba always comes from the same slave family.

Thus, the ministers who assist the emperor, rather than being members of the high nobility of the Nakomsé, are

systematically chosen from outside of it, from among the common people and the slaves. They represent at court, as we shall more clearly see, the different social categories, professions, and castes. "Those without birth," slaves and laborers, organized into professions (castes), far from being kept separated from power in this period which extends far beyond the Occidental Middle Ages (since, very likely, it may go back to the first century and the foundation of Ghana), are associated with it, not in any symbolic but in an organic way. Each profession has its representatives within the government; they will, as needed, present its complaints.

That is the spirit of this constitution. In order to comprehend its originality, we would have to imagine, at midpoint of the Middle Ages (1352–53, the time of Ibn Battuta's voyage to the Sudan and of the Hundred Years War), not just some provincial lord, but the King of France or of England, giving a share of his power, with a voice in decisions, to the rural serfs, bound to the soil, the free peasants, the town guildsmen, and the merchants. And beyond all that, imagine the existence of a tradition according to which the king, within the framework of an already-constitutional monarchy, cannot reign, cannot have moral and political authority in the eyes of the people, unless he is invested by a bourgeois who is also chosen from among one or a few traditionally determined families. Neither the bourgeoisie nor the peasantry of the West would then have had the revolutionary virulence that once imbued them, and the course of Western European history would probably have been different.

The non-absolute nature of the monarchy is revealed by the fact that, once invested, the ministers cannot be removed by the king.

Below the ministers come servants of all categories, bureaucrats and military chiefs. The samandé naba is the infantry general: he is not allowed to ride a horse, but at most only an ass, for, since he is a slave, the horse is too noble a steed for

him; however, in some cases, he may replace the togo naba, the Prime Minister. The kom naba is leader of the slave soldiers; he cannot command free soldiers. The tom naba is in charge of the "Sand of Investiture." We will return to this ceremony in dealing with the coronation of the King.

In its general lines, this is the structure of the council the emperor depends on in order to govern. All details concerning it are to be found in Tauxier.[2] Before analyzing any more deeply the political organization of the African states, we must briefly consider the principles of the Constitution of Cayor. Despite the historical or rather geographic distance separating them, they appear to be a replica of those of the Mossi.

THE CONSTITUTION OF CAYOR

At the height of the power of Ghana, that is, probably from the third to the tenth century, tropical Africa as far as the Atlantic Ocean was ruled by it. Cayor was in all likelihood a former province of Ghana which, in the sixteenth century at the time when the author of the *Tarikh es Sudan* was writing, had already become emancipated into an autonomous kingdom, independent of that of the Djoloff, with a Damel at its head.[3]

The government council which invested the king was constituted as follows:

Lamane Diamatil Botal ub Ndiob Badié Gateigne	representatives of free men, men of castes or without castes, *gor, gér,* or *ñeño*
Eliman of MBalle Sérigne of the village of Kab	representatives of the Muslim clergy
Diawerigne MBul Gallo Diaraf Bunt Ker	representatives of the Tieddos and prisoners of the Crown.

The council was convened and presided over by the Diawerigne MBul Diambur, hereditary representative of free men.

The Tieddos comprised all the individuals attached to the king, whether as soldiers or courtiers. That at least is the meaning of the term retained at the end of the independence of Cayor, engineered by Faidherbe under Napoleon III.

This constitution was therefore in effect until 1870. This fact shows that African political constitutions had not appreciably changed with time. Only in the cases where the royal branch became Islamized do we see certain transformations. That was the case of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai.

The seven Cayorian dynasties, to which we will return in discussing succession to the throne, never embraced Islam. It seems that one of the last Damels of Cayor, Latdjor Diop, the very one who had offered such determined resistance to Faidherbe, the symbol of national struggle in Senegal, converted to Islam for diplomatic reasons, in order to find new allies in Salum, such as the Tuculor marabout Ma Ba Diakhu, and in Trarza. It was also customary to oppose the Tieddos to the Domi Sokhna. The latter were the constituent element of the Muslim clergy. They were separate from the traditional priests, and the two groups shared a reciprocal hatred and fought each other without mercy, for there was no possible common ground between them. The Domi Sokhna had the characteristic of being most often members of the nobility; they came from the same social class as the aristocrats, but because of their conversion to Islam were despised and disowned by their blood brothers. It often happened that the latter, because of the matriarchy then in effect, would kidnap their daughters in order to give them in marriage to Tieddos, thus, as they saw it, limiting the damage done.

The Mossi and Cayorian constitutions reflect a political organization which must have been in effect since Ghana, and therefore probably dominated the African states for nearly two thousand years.

Actually, we have fewer details concerning the constitution of Ghana. Bakri relates that the king's interpreters were often chosen from among the Muslims; likewise, the steward of the Treasury and the majority of viziers.[4] There is then every reason to believe that in 1067, at the time Bakri wrote, Islamization of Ghana, though still only very slight, had already influenced its political customs.

The political constitution of Songhai, as it is revealed to us through the text of the *Tarikh es Sudan*, which dates from the sixteenth century, shows an identical situation. The same must also have been true in Mali, and Ibn Khaldun gives the name of its first Islamized king, Bermendana.[5]

MATRILINEAL SUCCESSION: GHANA, MALI

Within the framework of the rites governing succession to the throne and appointment of the various ministers and functionaries of the empires, we can best sense the changes made in the constitutions as a result of foreign influences. In Ghana, the old African tradition was still strictly observed. Bakri is formal on the subject: succession was matrilineal. Only the emperor and his heir apparent, his sister's son, were allowed to wear cut and sewn garments. In 1067, the sovereign of Bakri's time was the Tunka Menin, who had succeeded his maternal uncle Bessi.

> Among this people, custom and rules demand that the successor to the king be his sister's son; for, they say, the sovereign can be sure that his nephew is indeed his sister's son: but nothing can assure him that the son he considers his own in actuality is.[6]

The custom of matrilineal succession can be accepted, without necessarily attaching any importance to the justification given for it, although the latter seems convincing. This explanation, very often heard in Black Africa, considerably

postdates the clanic conditions of economic life which gave birth to the matriarchy.[7]

Since the succession to the throne was so strictly regulated, one must suppose that the appointment of the various ministers had not yet become, as it would five centuries later in Songhai, a purely administrative act, made practically without regard to tradition.

Ghana was weakened by the Sussu (Sosso) attacks. In 1242, the king of the exterior province of Mali would seize it. He was Sundiata Keita, one of the greatest of all the empire-builders of Black Africa. Mali then would take the place of Ghana by subduing the Sossos. We know that Bermendana was the first of its kings to become Islamized. Ibn Khaldun gives some interesting details on the succession to the throne of Mali: it was still matrilineal. Mari Djata (*djata* is "lion" in Mandingo; *djat*, "to ward off the lion" in Wolof) was the first powerful monarch of Mali: It was he who put down the turbulence of the Sossos and deprived them of any type of sovereignty. His son, Mensa Weli, succeeded him, then his brother Wati, and Khalifa, another brother. After the destruction of Ghana, there seems to have been a period of turmoil and political instability, during which the traditional rules of succession were temporarily disregarded. This is confirmed by the reign of Khalifa, an unworthy and bloody prince, who spent his time shooting at passersby with bow and arrow. The people, instead of challenging the monarchy, got rid of him by murdering him and returned to the traditional matrilineal rule of succession.

> Abu-Bekr, the son of Mari-Djata's daughter, succeeded to the throne. He was chosen king according to the principle of the barbaric nations which place the sister (of the deceased monarch) or that sister's son in possession of the throne. We did not learn the paternal genealogy of this prince. At his death by a freedman of the royal family, the usurper Sakura, seized power.[8]

Ibn Battuta, in his voyage to the Sudan, gives precious information about imperial audiences in Mali. The king was assisted by several *ferraris*, each of whom maintained a small court of his own, in the manner of Mossi or Cayorian ministers. However, we have no details about the manner in which they were selected. The author, on the other hand, relates that civil inheritance, on the level of the common people, was matrilineal, and expresses surprise at having come across such a practice only among the Blacks of Africa and India. He also informs us that the child bears the name of his maternal uncle, the one whose heir he is to be. The same method of inheritance thus applied in the case of both the common people and the aristocracy.[9]

SONGHAI, THE ORIENTAL INFLUENCE

Songhai, which belongs to the last phase of the Islamization of sixteenth-century Africa, had political customs less embedded in tradition. They in every way resemble those which applied in the caliphates of Baghdad and the courts of the Arab Orient. The same endless intrigues took place around the throne. Islamic Songhai seems to have recognized only the right of primogeniture; but that was purely theoretical, for the eldest son, if not energetic, or disadvantaged ever so little by circumstances, automatically lost his right to the throne, giving way to another son of the late Askia or any other intriguing personage who succeeded in gaining the support of some influential high functionary. The right of primogeniture was so fragile in the minds and consciences of the royal electors that it seemed normal automatically to disregard the eldest heir if he happened to be away at the time of the election. This was in no way a sanction against a son guilty of the crime of not assisting his father in his dying moments, as one might suppose. Upon the death of the Askia Daud, the eldest of the sons who were at his bedside, El Hadj, took up

his arms and mounted his horse as a sign of taking power. As he was more audacious and more energetic than his brothers and all the courtiers feared him, for he knew how to counter their intrigues, they all acquiesced, even adding to his claims. They proclaimed him king (Askia), adding that "El Hadj deserved power and would have been worthy to hold it even in Baghdad."[10] El Hadj, with his entourage, left for Kao Kao, or Gao, the capital of the empire. An incident which occurred on the road, as a result of the intrigues of one of his brothers, Hâmed, allows us to form our own opinion of how they regarded the question of succession. One of the brothers of the new Askia addressed him in the following manner: "We admit only the right of primogeniture. If Mohammed-Benkan [the absent firstborn] had been present this day, the power would not have fallen to you."[11] An Askia deposed by his brother did not have the right to take his sons into exile with him. They automatically went under the "paternal" authority of the victorious ruling brother and were in line to succeed him. That is the reason why the hi-koï who stripped Askia Ishâq II of the royal insignia after his defeat at Djuder pointed out to him that he did not have the right to take his sons with him. To which the Askia answered that he had been defeated by an alien who was succeeding him and not by a brother.[12]

The sons of Benkan were compelled to hide all through the reign of El Hadj, for fear of being murdered as legitimate claimants to the throne. This would continue during the reign of Askia Mohammed Brâno and they would not be seen again until the interregnum which preceded the advent of Askia Ishâq.

It very often happened that a given courtier was responsible for a prince's accession to the throne. According to the *Tarikh es Sudan* (Chapter XV), Askia Ismael was elevated to the throne by the dendi-fâri Mar-Tomzo on the very day his predecessor was deposed; and a dendi-fâri was merely the governor of a province.

Succession to the throne could cause troubles even in

filial relations. Thus, fâri-mondzo Mussa revolted against his father, Askia El-Hadj Mohammed, deposed him, and took his place. After which, he attempted to exterminate his brothers, a certain number of whom escaped to Tendirma and the protection of the kormina-fâri Otsmân-Yubâdo (Chapter XIV). Brothers of the same father, under the African system of polygamous life, were social rivals and did not hesitate to eliminate one another when a matter as important as succession to the throne was involved: Askia Mussa's struggle against his brothers was systematic and unmerciful. Nor was this any longer an isolated case; it became the usual practice in Songhai. All the Askias except Askia Mohammed were sons of "concubines,"[13] according to Kâti (Chapter VI, p. 151). Whereas the reverse was true for the kings of Bara: which would explain the respect that the Askias showed them. The latter were compelled to consider the advice of the bara-koïs. Bara-koï Mansa Kintade, whose mother was a slave, was the only one born of a "concubine."

The administrative organization and its extreme centralism will be described later on. However, we can note here and now that there were provincial governors of varying importance, such as the fâri, the balama, etc.; there were also governors of towns and of border marches such as the koï, mondzo, farba, etc. As against the custom in force in Mossi and Cayor, the Askia appears to have appointed them arbitrarily; he might name to these important positions his son or any other person of his entourage. There was no shortage of intrigues among the candidates; there was often actual bargaining with the Askia, almost a contractual agreement: "Make me the Balama; I will make you the Askia."

Ismael, at his accession, was obliged to give satisfaction to a courtier, by giving him a higher position than the one he had hoped for.

Army generals were no longer—as among the Mossi and Wolofs—chosen systematically from among slaves; they could be any kind of citizens, perhaps even nobles. After having

suffered a defeat in the Kanta, Askia Mohammed Benkan wanted to reestablish his prestige by attacking Gurma; to his utter disappointment, his general Dankolko, completely absorbed in a game of chess, remained unaware of the proximity of the enemy who took the field. The king dismissed him, but the general asked for authorization first to name his own successor; the king appeared to give him satisfaction, but did not keep his promise. The spirit in which army chiefs and functionaries were appointed is thus made abundantly clear.[14]

Under the reign of Askia Daud (advent March 24, 1549), the kormina-fâri El-Hâdi revolted against the Askia. The hikoï, Bokar-Chîli-Idji, said to the king, "Appoint me to the office of Dendi-Fâri and I promise to take El-Hâdi and turn him over to you." And it was done.[15]

There was one characteristic object among the royal insignia of the Askias: the *tin-touri* ("kindling wood" in Songhai). It was supposed to be a dead ember from the first fire lit in the country by its first occupants. The members of this family transmitted this emblem from one generation to the next. Thus making them the masters of the soil.

What we have just said about the origins of the Askias shows that they were not the masters of the soil, but usurped this emblem in order themselves to embody the various attributed of sovereignty.[16]

The political customs of Songhai in every way recall those illustrated by the tragic end of the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed, Hussein, who was murdered at Kerbela (Arabia). The custom even spread of cutting off the heads of defeated pretenders to the throne and bringing them to the Askia as a pledge of devotion: this was also the fate of the descendants of the Prophet.

PRECEDENCE IN SONGHAI

Kâti gives details of the greatest importance about the hierarchy of positions in Songhai under Askia Mohammed.