A Homoarchic Alternative to the Homoarchic State: Benin Kingdom of the 13th–19th Centuries*

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ABSTRACT

Until recently, cultural evolution has commonly been regarded as a permanent teleological move to a greater level of hierarchy, crowned with state formation. However, recent research based upon the principle of heterarchy – '... the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked or when they possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways' (Crumley 1995: 3) changes the usual picture dramatically. The opposite of heterarchy, then, would be a condition in a society in which relationships in most contexts are ordered mainly according to one principal hierarchical relationship. This organizational principle may be called 'homoarchy'. Homoarchy and heterarchy represent the most universal 'ideal' principles and basic trajectories of socio-cultural (including political) organization and its transformations. There are no universal evolutionary stages – band, tribe, chiefdom, state or otherwise – inasmuch as cultures so characterized could be heterarchical or homoarchical: they could be organized differently, while having an equal level of overall social complexity. However, alternativity exists not only between heterarchic and homoarchic cultures but also within each of the respective types.

In particular, the present article attempts at demonstrating that the Benin Kingdom of the 13th – 19th centuries, being an explicitly homoarchic culture not inferior to early states in the level of complexity, nevertheless was not a state as it lacked administrative specialization and pronounced priority of the supra-kin ties.

The Benin form of socio-political organization can be called 'megacommunity', and its structure can be depicted as four concentric circles forming an upset cone: the extended family, community, chiefdom, and megacommunity (kingdom). Thus, the homoarchic megacommunity turns out an alternative to the homoarchic by definition (Claessen and Skalník 1978: 640) early state.

PREFACE: WHAT IS HOMOARCHY?

The word 'homoarchy' first came to the present author and his colleague, Andrey Korotayev's minds during an informal discussion of Carole Crumley's concept of 'heterarchy' (1979; 1987; 1995; 2001). Crumley (1995: 3; see also 1979: 144; 1987: 158; 2001: 25) defines the heterarchy '… as the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked or when they possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways', just in the vein heterarchy is defined in biophysics from which the term was imported by her to social science (see Crumley 1987: 156–157). Respectively, homoarchy may be coined as 'the relation of elements to one another when they are rigidly ranked one way only, and thus possess no (or at least very limited) potential for being unranked or ranked in another or a number of different ways at least without cardinal reshaping of the whole socio-political order'. The association used for delimitation of heterarchy and hierarchy in cybernetics is applicable for our purposes as well: 'Heterarchy [is the] form of organization resembling a network or fishnet' while 'Hierarchy [is the] form of organization resembling a pyramid' (Dictionary n.d).

However, in social science homoarchy must not be identified with hierarchy (as well as heterarchy must not be mixed up with egalitarianism [Brumfiel 1995: 129]). Hierarchy is an attribute of any social system while on the other hand, in any society both 'vertical' and 'horizontal' social links may be observed (Berreman 1981; Smith, M. E. 1985; Ehrenreich *et al.* 1995: 1–5, 87–100, 116–120, 125–131; Blanton 1998; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000c; for this dictum verity's explicit confirmation in recent works on an impressive variety of specific cultures, based on different kinds of sources – archaeological, written, and first-hand ethnographic, see *e.g.*, Kelly 1993; Jolly and Mosko 1994; Small

1995; Wailes 1995; Kammerer 1998; Kristiansen 1998: 54–56; Nangoro 1998: 47–48; Anderson, C. E. 1999; Kuijt 2000: 312–315; Scarborough *et al.* 2003). More so: sometimes it seems too difficult to designate a society as 'homoarchic' or 'heterarchic' even at the most general level of analysis, like in the cases of the late-ancient Germans (see, *e.g.*, Gurevich 1999: 45–57) and early-medieval 'Barbarian kingdoms' in which one can observe monarchy and quite rigid social hierarchy combined with (at least at the beginning) democratic institutions and procedures (like selection of the king), not less significant for the whole socio-political system's operation (see, *e.g.*, Diesner 1966; Claude 1970; Dvoretskaja 1982). Hence, the questions which rise are if in a given social system there is only one hierarchy or there many of them? and in the latter case, are the hierarchies ranked rigidly or not: do, say, two individuals find themselves ranked towards each other the same way in any social context or not?

Every hierarchy in a society is underpinned by a specific set of values. A society may be considered as homoarchic when there is one value which is central to all the hierarchies and not only integrates but also arranges in a definite pyramidal order all the other, secondary to it, values and hierarchies they underpin. Under such circumstances this value 'encompasses' all the rest and makes the society 'holistic' (Dumont 1966/1980), that is homoarchic when the whole unequivocally dominates parts as the supreme expression of that all-embracing and all-penetrable value. Although Dumont's vision of 'purity' as the value (or idea) encompassing the holistic society in India is criticized nowadays (Mosko 1994b: 24–50; Quigley 1999), his theoretical contribution's validity is nevertheless testified, for example, by the 20th century totalitarian societies in which, *e.g.*, the idea of communism clearly did play precisely the role Dumont attributes to that of purity in the case of India. On the contrary, when 'there is a multiplicity of "hierarchical" or asymmetrical oppositions, none of which are reducible to any of the others or to a single master opposition or value', 'the … case immediately departs from the Dumontian formulation' (Mosko 1994a: 214) – the society does not fit the homoarchic (or hierarchic in the Dumontian sense) model.

So, I hope that the idea of homoarchy may serve as a useful counterpart for that of heterarchy (Bondarenko and Crumley 2004; see also Barry, III 2004; Cook 2004; Reicher 2004).

Besides, also very importantly, I believe it is legitimate to apply notions, heterarchy and homoarchy, not to power relations only (to what Crumley destines the former of them[1]) but within a broader framework of social relations and structure in general. In his review of one of Crumley's recent articles on heterarchy Robert Carneiro asks: 'But by introducing this term into the study of political evolution does Crumley really enhance our understanding of the process?' (2004: 163). The answer the patriarch of cultural evolutionist studies gives himself is strongly in the negative. I would dare disagree with Carneiro and say that in my opinion, the concept of heterarchy is a significant contribution to anthropological theory (to what its growing popularity testifies [see, *e.g.*, Ehrenreich *et al.* 1995; Haggis *et al.* 2003; Scarborough *et al.* 2003; Alexeev *et al.* 2004: 5–17]) even in its present (initial) form. In the meantime I hope that its broadening first, by supplementing with the notion of homoarchy and second, by extending its inclusion up to the whole scope and variety of relations in society, could make the concept's validity even higher.

Fair dissatisfaction with the 'classical' unilineal typological schemes like 'from band to state' (Service 1962/1971) or 'from egalitarian organization to state society' (Fried 1967) growing especially rapidly from the second half of the 1980s (see particularly, Mann 1986; Maisels 1987; Upham 1990; Yoffee 1993; Ehrenreich *et al.* 1995; McIntosh 1999; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000a; Claessen 2000; Kradin *et al.* 2000; Guidi 2002; Grinin *et al.* 2004), has resulted in thus much fair and theoretically prospective shift of researchers' emphasis from societies as isolated entities to them as elements of wider cultural networks, and in connection with it, from evolutionary stages to transformation processes. However, I do believe that Carneiro (2000; 2003: 155–156) is essentially right when he argues that the dichotomy 'process *versus* stages' is 'false': both are important. (In the meantime, I leave apart the problems I feel with Carneiro's concrete interpretation concentrated in such 'minor linguistic peculiarities' as that I would prefer to

speak in the multilinear vein about 'processes', not 'the process' and about 'types' besides 'stages'). The problem is not that there are as if no social types or that in fact there are much more of them than four, but that they cannot be arranged on the 'stairs' of one 'ladder', and that purely typological thinking, especially in the unilineal style prevents from giving full consideration to those changes which crucially transform a society but do not pull it to the next stair of the notorious types ladder.

In particular, the groundbreaking in my opinion 'dual-processual theory' elaborated in the last decade by Mesoamericanists (*e.g.*, Blanton 1994; Feinman 1995; Blanton *et al.* 1996), is aimed at the same idea as the heterarchy – homoarchy: '… to account for variation among societies of similar complexity and scale' (Blanton *et al.* 1996: 1). Note that the dichotomy of homoarchic and heterarchic societies is observable at all the levels of social complexity (see Bondarenko 1997b: 10–15; 1998a, 1998c, 2000c; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000c; Bondarenko *et al.* 2002; Korotayev *et al.* 2000) and furthermore, in the course of history a society can change its internal organization from homoarchic to heterarchic or *vice versa*, not infrequently without a change of its overall level of complexity (for some of many examples of the latter case, see Leach 1954; Shkunayev 1988; Levy 1995; Korotayev 1996; Kowalewski 2000). Though it would be completely wrong to argue that, for instance, 'the network strategy' leads to heterarchy while 'the corporate strategy' gives rise to (generally) homoarchic societies or *vice versa*, I feel that the two approaches may be complementary within the general explanatory framework seeking to propose 'a suitable behavioral theory' (Blanton *et al.* 1996: 1) of the socio-cultural types variability, particularly as both of them concentrate on the dialectics of the individual and the group, and centralization and decentralization, and attempt '… to move beyond a *typology* approach…' (White 1995: 119; emphasis in the original). However, I agree with one of the dual-processual theory advocates, Paul Wason (*e.g.*, Wason and Baldia 2000) that 'with due caution, a typological approach is still valid…' (Wason 1995: 25). Establishing such a link, being beyond the present generally typological article's purposes, is a task for the future[2].

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS CALLED THE STATE?

The overwhelming majority of modern theories of the state consider this phenomenon as a specialized and centralized institution for governing a society, to what its right to exercise coercive authority – legitimized violence is often added as the state's critical characteristic feature (see *e.g.*, 'summarizing' definitions in anthropological encyclopedias, text-books, and general publications of the last decade: Earle 1994: 945; Claessen 1996; Marcus and Feinman 1998: 4; Ember and Ember 1999: 226–229, 242; Abélès 2000; Kradin 2004: 268). This approach to the state, rooted in political, philosophic, legal, and anthropological thought from Antiquity on (Hodgen 1964: 354–515; Harris 1968; Service 1975: 21–46; 1978; Nersesjants 1985; 1986; Iljushechkin 1996: 13–92; Gomerov 2002: 14–68), in the 20th century became equally typical of Marxists, (neo)evolutionists, and structuralists notwithstanding all the differences between them[3]. We may argue safely that these two characteristics – political centralization ('the "concentration" of power in the hands of a few' [Roscoe 1993: 113]) and specialization of administration, form the backbone of the theory of the state in general[4].

However, contrary to the postulate of political anthropology's Founding Fathers, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940/1987: 5), political centralization cannot be regarded as a specifically state's feature as it is applicable more or less to all forms of complex homoarchic (organized 'vertically') societies including chiefdoms first and foremost[5]. Even more so, in current research of the state-level polities '… there is a clear movement away from a view of states as highly centralized, omnipotent entities toward a heterogeneous model that recognizes variability in state/urban organization and explores the limits of state power within the broader society' (Stein 1998: 10). Good examples of such movement have recently been provided by Blanton (1998) and Kristiansen (1998). However, it must be noted that *e.g.*, when Kristiansen postulates the opposition between 'the decentralized archaic state' and 'the centralized archaic state' (1998: 46–48)[6], he *de facto* means that the former is less centralized than the latter but not that it is not centralized at all. Is it really true lack of centralization (if it is not mixed up with one person's omnipotence or lack of intermediary

administrative levels) when 'government is carried out (by "the warrior chiefs and king" – *D. B.*) through regional and local vassal chiefs…' (1998: 46)?![7] It would be better to describe such a society as politically centralized but disintegrated (and what Kristiansen calls the centralized archaic state as politically [more] centralized integrated one).

In the meantime, specialization resulting in professionalization is precisely the feature which is typical of the state only, it is not by chance that in the specialization of the administrative apparatus scholars usually see the brink between the state and all the non-state forms of socio-political organization, again including homoarchic ones like the chiefdom and complex chiefdom (see Wright 1977: 381–385; Earle 1978: 1–7; Godiner 1991; Belkov 1995: 171–175; Spencer 1998; Blanton *et al.* 1999: 112; Johnson and Earle 2000: 245–329; Bondarenko 2001: 244–245). So, I shall agree with Charles Spencer's (1998: 5) elegantly simple dictum (the first part of which I have already just quoted in note 5 and which is based on Henry Wright's seminal publication of 1977): specifically chiefdoms are 'societies with centralized but not internally specialized authority', and states are 'societies with centralized and also internally specialized authority' (see also Earle 1987: 289). 'A state administration, from this perspective, is inherently bureaucratic' (Spencer 2003: 11185; see also Cohen 1978).

Indeed, what makes the administrative apparatus specialized? It becomes such when it is 'filled' with professional (*i.e.*, permanent and full-time) administrators thus forming bureaucracy. Max Weber elaborated the most authoritative concept of bureaucracy and his ideas form an implicit or explicit background for most of influential modern theories of the state[8]. Though not all the famous Weber's ten features of bureaucracy could apply to preindustrial states mainly because his definition is based on executive and decision-making functions only (Morony 1987: 9–10), and although it is stressed sometimes (recently, *e.g.*, by Claessen and Oosten [1996: 5–6; Claessen 2003: 162], Kristiansen [1998: 45, 46], Johnson and Earle [2000: 248], Chabal, Feinman, and Skalník [2004: 28], Christian [2004: 273–274], and Kradin [2004: 179]) that bureaucracy can be poorly developed in early states, it must be admitted that it still has to be present as such if a given society is attributed as a state. In the meantime, even most complex among all complex

chiefdoms, like Cahokia (Pauketat 1994; Milner 1998), the Powhatan paramountcy (Potter 1993; Rountree and Turner III 1998), or Hawaii (Earle 1978, 1997, 2000) notwithstanding their political sophistication, could not boast of having professional administrators at all. The existence of specialized administration was also improbable in Benin of the First (*Ogiso*s) dynasty time, in the $10^{th} – 12^{th}$ centuries (see Bondarenko 2001: 108–117) attributed by me as a complex chiefdom elsewhere (Bondarenko 2000b: 102–103; 2001: 133–135; 2004: 340).

WAS THERE BENIN BUREAUCRACY?

So, it looks reasonable to examine the list of the bureaucrats' characteristic features Weber singled out. Do they fit titled chiefs – administrators of the $13^{th} – 19^{th}$ centuries Benin Kingdom?[9] (For a more detailed analysis see Bondarenko 2001: 212–250; 2002). Weber (1922/1947: 333–334) wrote about bureaucrats:

> (1) They are personally free and subject to authority only with respect to their impersonal official obligations; (2) They are organized in a clearly defined hierarchy of offices; (3) Each office has a clearly defined sphere of competence in the legal sense; (4) The office is filled by a free contractual relationship. Thus, in principle, there is free selection; (5) Candidates… are appointed, not elected; (6) They are remunerated by fixed salaries… ; (7) The office is treated as a sole, or at least the primary, occupation of the incumbent; (8) It constitutes a career... ; (9) The official works entirely separated from ownership of the means of administration and without appropriation of his position; (10) He is subject to strict and systematic discipline and control in the conduct of the office.

Are there any grounds to regard Benin titled chiefs as bureaucrats *i.e.*, professional administrators?[10]

Every Benin chief belonged to one of the two broad categories: his title was either hereditary (what is impossible if he is really a bureaucrat – see Weber's point 9) or not. There were quite few hereditary titles in the Benin Kingdom: those of the most aristocratic title-holders congregation members – the *Uzama N'Ihinron* (the 'kingmakers'), ranked highest among all the chiefs (initially there were six and from the middle of the 15th century seven of them),

and of several other, less important dignitaries. The *Uzama N'Ihin-ron* was established in the 13th century by the first ruler of the Second Dynasty – Eweka I and the majority of other hereditary titles appeared in the time of *Oba* (supreme ruler) Ewuare in the mid-15th century.

Non-hereditary title-holders were considered as 'appointed by the *Oba*' and fell into two major groups, besides some other, secondary by their significance in the administrative mechanism. The first of those two categories was called *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe* (the 'palace chiefs'). This institution was established by the fourth supreme ruler, Ewedo within the framework of his anti-*Uzama* actions in the mid-13th century. The *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe* were divided into three 'palace societies'. Each of these societies, in its turn, also fell into three groups imitating the Bini's traditional age-sets system. The kingmakers were really pushed to the background but eventually those were not the *Oba*s but the palace chiefs who came to the fore. The significance of the *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe* was great. This association members received their might due not only to their official titles and rights but also, maybe even first of all owing to their proximity to the supreme ruler. One of their main tasks was to serve mediators between the *Oba* and the people, for the prohibition to communicate with his subjects freely seems to be among the supreme ruler's taboos already at least in the beginning of the 17th century. Hence, the palace chiefs could rather easily 'regulate' the information flows to and from the palace in their own interests. From the European written sources of the 17th – 19th centuries one can see that these chiefs really did it, and also see, what a considerable might the *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe* under the leadership of *Uwangue* concentrated in their hands that time. Eventually, in the 17th century the palace chiefs, and not the supreme ruler's lineage or the *Uzama* members furthermore, played the decisive role in the selection of the descendent to the throne.

Another major category of non-hereditary title-holders, the *Eghaevbo N'Ore* (the 'town chiefs') was established later, in the mid-15th century by Ewuare, already as a counterbalance to the palace chiefs though basically they were ranked lower than the *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe*. They struggled actively with the latter for the influence on the *Oba*s and also fought for power with the supreme

rulers themselves. All in all, the town chiefs were a success. The *Eghaevbo N'Ore*'s struggle for power was led by the head of this category of title-holders, the *Iyase* (whose own title was introduced much earlier, in the mid-13th century by *Oba* Ewedo). In the course of time, he became the most powerful and influential figure in the Benin administrative system and society. Since the *Eghaevbo N'Ore*'s introduction the antagonism of the *Iyase*s to the *Oba*s, as Kochakova remarks (1986: 244), 'runs all through the whole space of the Benin history'. Even the supplanting of the British colonial administration could not cease their rivalry.

So, the *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe* and *Eghaevbo N'Ore*, whose behavior was very far from that 'ordered' to them by Weber (in point 10) were the principal associations of non-hereditary chiefs in the Benin Kingdom. However, the *Oba*s appointed chiefs just formally, for firstly, to be distinct, the supreme ruler appointed only the lineage out of which its members (officially not involved into the administrative system) selected a concrete person for granting the title. Second, due to the strength of the tradition and real might of the palace and town chiefs, titles were held within the same extended families (*egbe*s) for hundreds of years (though officially every lawful Bini man could claim for a non-hereditary title).

Thus in reality there was no free choice of administrators and their appointment by higher authorities. In practice, administrators were not appointed at all as well as there was no free selection of them on the societal level; they were elected within definite lineages and extended families. Only their more or less formal investiture was the *Oba*'s privilege and duty (compare with Weber's points 5 and 4). The sovereign's power over distant chiefdoms' rulers could be rather weak (Bradbury 1957: 33; 1973: 178) and it may be reasonable to suppose (especially if one trusts the folklore evidence [Sidahome 1964: 49–50, 163]) that during the last turbulent centuries of the Benin Kingdom's existence the *Oba*s only blindly confirmed the candidatures proposed to him and this procedure in its essence transformed into a mere *pro forma*, the performing of an ancient ritual ('anti-point 9' of Weber).

The chiefs were not simple officials at the supreme ruler's service. On the one hand, the *Oba*s regularly established ties of

relationship with them (what contradicts Weber's point 1) marrying the titled chiefs' daughters and giving their own daughters in marriage to the chiefs. On the other hand, the chiefs constantly preserved close connections with the kinship organization and fulfilled different non-administrative functions ascribed to them as kin units members (hence, the Benin realities did not fit point 7 of Weber). In the central bodies' activities they also participated as representatives of their titled lineages, not as individuals. Titled chiefs exercised control over communities through local leaders. It was unreal to dig titled chiefs up from their native social units and to send them to govern 'alien' communities (*iya*s)[11]. Under the conditions when all the levels of socio-political complexity were penetrated by communal in their essence ties and relations which dominated at all of them, the division of the country into merely administrative units (including by means of transforming into administrative units communities and chiefdoms) was impossible.

The supreme chiefs always were first and foremost not post- but title-holders. A chief could be deprived from his post by the *Oba*'s command, but the title, once given rested with the chief till the end of his life. The native historian, ethnographer, and courtier Jacob Egharevba openly argued (1949: 24) that the supreme ruler '… could… suspend any titled chief from his post, but the chief must still hold his title for life' (see also Egharevba 1956: 6; Igbafe 1979: 4). The chiefs received all their privileges in accordance with titles and were not rewarded just for posts they held. The post was an unavoidable enclosure to the title. For example, in reality the post could demand from the '*Oba*'s wardrobe keeper' not cleaning and airing of his robes at all, but attending to certain duties by no means connected with such a kind of activities. These duties were not clearly defined and separated from those of other chiefs as well as all the categories of titled chiefs comprised officials of all kinds – priests, war leaders, etc. (compare with what Weber wrote in point 3).

Henri Claessen and Peter Skalník (1978: 576) distinguish two major types of functionaries in early states: '(a) general functionaries, whose activities embrace a number of types of governmental function; (b) special functionaries, whose governmental activities are restricted to only one aspect of government administration'.

Their sample's analysis allowed to formulate the regularities as follows: 'In early states general functionaries are found mostly on the regional level…' and 'In early states specialist functionaries are usually found at the top level of the administrative apparatus' (Claessen and Skalník 1978: 579, 580). Basing on the aforesaid we can argue without hesitation that in Benin general functionaries the top administrative level was dominated by general functionaries absolutely. There was a dim notion of higher and lower titles and more or less important duties among the Bini and for some functionaries these or those of their numerous and diverse duties were regarded as principal or primary. For example, in the *Uzama N'Ihinron* the *Ezomo* title holders' main role was that of a general, and *Eholo N'Ire*'s cardinal task was priestly. However, even many other members of this most aristocratic chiefs grade had no one dominant function besides the function which was common for all the *Uzama* members: in earlier times to select and later only to inaugurate every new *Oba*. There was no fixed hierarchy neither within the supreme chiefs' congregations (most often, only their heads were definitely known) nor within these or those spheres of activities – administrative, priestly and so on (compare with point 2 of Weber).

The material well-being of the supreme chiefs (at least prior to the period of active trade with Europeans [Ryder 1969; Bondarenko 1995a: 153–157]) was based on receiving of a share of what had been produced in their communities. It was not dependent crucially either on their share in tribute once or twice a year collected by them for the *Oba* or on the sovereign's 'presents' chiefs used to get from time to time. In fact, those undefined share in tribute and occasional monarch's gifts stood for fixed salaries which have never been due to them at all (nothing in common with Weber's point 6).

As titles belonged to the same lineages for centuries, there was no free competition for titles in the society. Then, there were no opportunities for making a career, for chiefs held first and foremost titles, and titles besides lack of their well-defined hierarchy, were not subjected to their changing by a person. Having once got a title, he could not only lose it by the *Oba*'s command but also receive another one, in addition to, or exchange for the previous one (compare to Weber's point 8).

So, our attempt to apply the Weber's features of bureaucracy to the Benin Kingdom of the 13th – 19th centuries reveals that *none* of them, including the most significant – independence of the kin organization, was characteristic of her titled chiefs. In fact, even the sovereign did not completely desert the communal organization (Bondarenko 1995a: 203–231; 2001: 193–211). The 'communal spirit' revealed itself in his support (including economic) by the populace, and his subjects not at all perceived the supreme ruler as a power alien for the community. 'He who owns you / Is among you here' are the lines of a medieval verse devoted to a new *Oba*'s inthronization (Elimimian 1986: 105). Just the fact that the *Oba*'s power was considered as continuation and strengthening of the legitimate community heads' authority at a new level, guaranteed the continuity of fundamental features of political organization at a change of rulers on the throne or of the general apportionment of forces in the upper strata. In its turn, the community provided the society with socio-economic firmness.

Indeed, though it is evident that the *Oba* shared many non-bureaucratic features of titled chiefs the analysis will not be complete if some more attention to the sovereign as a supreme administrator is not paid. In the situation when the basic unit in a society was not the individual but the collectivity, and kin relations were the background of the whole system of government up to its highest level (Bradbury 1957: 31), a new *Oba* came to power as a representative of his kin group first and foremost. The claims of the royal clan (*egbe umogun*) for supreme power besides 'proofs' by different myths (see Talbot 1926: III, 961–962; Beier 1980: 19–20), were substantiated in the idea of its members' descent from the father of the Second dynasty's founder Oranmiyan – Oduduwa, a deity and the first supreme ruler (*Oni*) of the sacred Yoruba town of Ife (called Uhe by the Bini). In the meantime, there was also another source of the dynasty's legitimacy: 'As the descendant of a deified Yoruba king, the *Oba* rules by divine right. Yet he is also an Edo[12], ruling with the permission of a council of "kingmaker" chiefs whose authority predates his own' (Gallagher 1983: 21). Both in official ideology and common people's consciousness the two sources of the dynasty's legitimacy were equally important and mutually complementary: 'The tradition indicates that neither of these loci of legitimacy is alone sufficient. Although the dual man-

date was a source of continuing political conflict for the *Oba*, it was also the ultimate source of his power' (*ibid.*).

Rather numerous (Bradbury 1957: 27–30) royal clan though privileged, had typical for the Bini extended families structure and mechanisms of functioning what revealed itself especially vividly in the rules of succession and their changes in the course of history (see Bondarenko 1995a: 194–203; 2001: 194–197). Due to this the *Oba* (typically not the senior in kin at the moment of accession to the throne) if he was a weak ruler, could even 'become the prisoner of his own hierarchic, ambitious household' (Ryder 1969: 6).

However, the *Oba* was invariably officially recognized as omnipotent and the possessor of all (land, people, etc.) in his realm (*e.g.*, Dapper 1668/1975: 168; 1671: 491; Thomas 1910: I, 91; Ajisafe 1945: 25, 75, 95; Bradbury 1957: 44; Akenzua 1974: 3; Jones 1983: 40). Nevertheless, neither the first nor the second was so in reality (as European visitors clearly understood [Van Nyendael 1705: 430; Smith, W. 1744: 228; Gallwey 1893: 129]). Particularly, land was held by communities while slaves were only prisoners of war and criminals (*e.g.*: Dennett 1910: 199; Ajisafe 1945: 75–76; Egharevba 1949: 65–66, 77; Ogbobine 1974: 17; Nwankwo 1987: 48). The phrases like 'all the land in Benin belongs to the *Oba* and all her inhabitants are his slaves' reflected attitude to him as to the guarantee of the country and populace's prosperity. This formula also served a means for expressing the idea of all Benin citizens' supracommunal unity symbolized and personalized by the sovereign.

As for the *Oba*'s essence as a political figure and his true role in government (with what I am concerned now), power was divided between him on the one hand, and titled chiefs of all the categories on the other. The supreme ruler was always considered as a member of all the ruling bodies (Dapper 1668/1975: 167–169; Talbot 1926: III, 581–590; Egharevba 1949: 29–33; 1960: 78–82; Bradbury 1957: 35–39) including the titled chiefs council participated by members of twenty-one grade of administrators (Ajisafe 1945: 18; Egharevba 1949: 29; 1960: 78–80; Bradbury 1957: 43–44; Igbafe 1979: 10–11). Notwithstanding this, the distribution of power between the sovereign and the chiefs was historically dynamic and had dialectics of its own. The 'profane functions – sacral duties' dichotomy was crucial at this point.

The institution of the *Oba* appeared as a combination of profane functions and sacral duties in one person, and the struggle between the *Oba* and the chiefs took the form of constant and gradually successful attempts of the latter to limit the sovereign's profane power by means of inflicting new binding taboos on him[13] and hence *volens nolens* increasing his sacrality inversely proportional for 'lists' of royal taboos (see, *e.g.*, Adams 1823: 111–113; Talbot 1926: III, 736–737). The final act ran high in the early 17th century when the chiefs succeeded in depriving the *Oba* of the right to command the army in person (Egharevba 1960: 32–33, 34; for the whole story see Bondarenko 2000e). Relations of the Europeans who visited the Benin court in the late 16th – 19th centuries are full of vivid stories and surprised or contemptuous remarks testifying to the 'king''s complete impotence at the face of his 'noblemen' and relatives (Ingram 1588/1904: 298; Van Nyendael 1705: 449; Gallwey 1892/1969: 345, 346; 1893: 129; Bindloss 1898/1968: 205; Boisragon 1898: 165; Leonard 1906: 372; Egharevba 1952: 14)[14].

This became possible due to the specifics of the Bini's consciousness in general and political consciousness in particular. In their minds, the true ruler is not the one who holds real (in our rational modern view) control levers but the one who is endowed with sacral power. Actually, *Oba*s themselves did a lot to increase the level of their sacralization, especially *Oba* Ewuare of the mid-15th century. By no means did the *Oba* become powerless: in the Benin society and culture context, sacral power was a specific kind of real power which allowed to limit effectively behavioral alternatives of the subjects (Bondarenko 1995a: 227–230). By the very fact of his presence on the throne the *Oba* went on playing the exceptionally important and 'practical' role of the all-Benin unity's symbol and thus did promote significantly the integration of socio-political segments into a whole – centralization in its socio-territorial aspect[15]. Characteristically, as a 'barbarian', 'foreigner' (*ete*") in Benin there was considered not any ethnically non-Bini but only the one 'who does not know the law (of the country – *D. B.*) and does not recognize the Oba' (Melzian 1937: 43). This critical role of the *Oba* became especially clear in the colonial times when after an attempt to abolish the institution immediately after the fall of Benin in 1897, the British had to restore it in 1914 as

far as it had become evident that 'if they were to secure even the grudging co-operation of the Bini they must restore the monarchy' (Igbafe 1975: 175; see also Zotova 1979: 105–114; Nevadomsky 1993: 66–67).

In general relations between the rulers (all-Benin authorities) and the ruled (communalists) were those of mutual necessity and complementary. Sargent (1986) has defined the relations between the supreme authorities and the community as exploitative (and called the former 'bureaucracy') but in reality in Benin there were no conditions for such relations' appearance (Bondarenko 1995a: 257–264, 273–274; for the criticism at Sargent's inadequate attempt to use Marxist categories in the analysis of Benin, see: Manning 1986; Wilks 1986). Power was not separated from the people in the Morgan – Engels's sense (Bradbury 1969: 21; Bondarenko 1993a: 165) what above all signifies that the all-Benin institutions' formation, recruitment of administrators into them, and the exercise of power by them took place in accordance with the community-kinship traditions, by means of the mechanisms determined by them. Not only heads of communities and chiefdoms through which titled chiefs coordinated relations between the Kingdom's parts and the whole, but also titled chiefs themselves did not become bureaucrats. They remained chiefs with all the mechanisms of coming to, and exercising of power, rights, privileges, duties, etc. typical of them.

There were also provided massive ideological pillars for this objective situation (see Bondarenko 2000a, 2000e; 2001: 186–188). At this point it is significant to note that it would be unreasonable to speak about the imposition of ideology 'from above' or self-deceiving of those at the social bottom: at least until the start of active trade with Europeans in the late 15th century Benin was characterized by mental continuity – principal identity of all the social groups' Weltanschauung (Bondarenko 1995a: 90–91, 165, 254–255) which also witnesses to the lack of unbridgeable gulf between the rulers and the ruled. People felt their complicity to power, its institutions and holders. As a result, 'a passion for legality and order' as a typical feature of African kingdoms (Armstrong 1960: 38) characterized Benin among others. Owe to this, Benin history of the *Oba*s period did not see revolts of the masses against central power except the uprisings in subjugated lands (and possi-

bly just one episode in Benin City in the 14ᵗʰ or 15ᵗʰ century [see Bondarenko 2001: 176–177]).

Such a trend of the Bini political culture kept easily within the framework of their general mental and behavioral paradigm. Every Bini was responsible for the realization of the Bini's 'national idea': an indefatigable vigil about permanent reestablishment of *status quo* in all spheres including political; first of all, by supporting proper relations between the living and the ancestors for the sake of subsequent existence of Benin and the whole universe (see Bondarenko 1995a: 73–89, 258–261; 1997a: 111, 119–122). In this respect, really in Benin 'everyone is the priest for himself'[16] (Van Nyendael 1705: 448). However, the unit leaders from the extended family level up to the 'national' one bore higher responsibility than commoners did, as their deeds unavoidably were not individual acts but those in their units' name. The widest, all-embracing unit (and actually cult group) was Benin society as a whole. The *Oba*, perceived as the father of all the Bini, was the supreme mediator in the alive – ancestors' relations. Performing rites of the group ancestors' cult (*erha*) was regarded as the most important of the leader's tasks. Hence, those valuable people caring of *bien public* deserved just gratitude and help, not preventing from fulfilling their duty. Encroachment on the authority (*ase*) was thus incredible (see Bondarenko 1994: 6–9; 1995a: 182, 260, 276–277).

For the Bini, universe was divided into mutually penetrable domains of people on the one hand, and ancestors' spirits and deities on the other. But this was one world fastened by power, its institutions and holders; each on the respective level. In fact, for the Bini, they existed precisely for the sake of integrating the universe (see Bondarenko 1995a: 24–89, 182–183; 1997a; 2000a: 192). This is why power, both the substance and its implementation in political institutions including that of the supreme ruler first and foremost, was surrounded with a halo of sacrality. Rooted and actively exercised in the community but also elevated to the rank of all-Benin ideology, the essentially kin ancestor worship could be only a thin pillar for the rise of bureaucracy. In this respect, an instructive example is provided by ancient China. Bureaucracy did not form there until ancestor worship was overshadowed by other religious cults and practices (rituals associated with the 'Mandate of Heaven' and some others) in the Warring States era of the 5ᵗʰ – 3ʳᵈ centuries B.C. (Baum 2004).

Resuming the analysis provided in the present section, I feel quite safe to argue that Benin was politically centralized but her administrative system was not specialized. Contrary to the First (*Ogiso*s) dynasty, the Second dynasty rulers of the 13th – 19th centuries turned out capable to establish true supremacy of the central political institutions over the society *i.e.*, to make effective their domination over it. But in essentially communal Benin society even those who governed it on the top level were not professional administrators – 'bureaucrats'. Thus, in accordance with the practically generally accepted idea of intimate connection between the state and bureaucracy, Benin cannot and should not be considered as a state.

WAS BENIN A SUPRA-KIN-BASED SOCIETY?

In the meantime, by the 13th century Benin had historically passed and culturally no doubt superceded the complex chiefdom at the level of which it was in the 10th – 12th centuries though such traits of the preceding period as *e.g.*, ethnic heterogeneity and non-participation of the supra-simple-chiefdom elite in subsistence production were inherited and strengthened further (see Bondarenko 2000b: 106–112; 2001: 232–243; 2004: 344–348). At the same number of complexity levels (two above local community) and socio-economic background (extended-family-based community and slash-and-burn hoe agriculture), Benin of the *Oba*s demonstrated an incomparably higher degree of integration, unity, and centralization. In her social complexity level, economic parameters, governmental apparatus' hierarchicity, and the spiritual sphere the Benin Kingdom was an equivalent of early states. Nevertheless, the society was still based on the homoarchic 'matrix' of the Bini community which consisted of extended families.

The community was characterized by a tangle of kin and neighbor ties dominated by kinship and by explicit social and administrative homoarchicity expressed particularly in unreserved superiority of the seniors over the juniors in any social interaction both in the family and (as an outcome of this [Sidahome 1964: 128]) the community (Egharevba 1949: 67–70; Bradbury 1957: 23–25; 1973: 149–209; Roese and Rees 1994: 543–545; Bondarenko 2001: 39–55). The age-grade system – *otu* (see Thomas

1910: I, 11–12; Talbot 1926: III, 547–549; Bradbury 1957: 15, 32, 34, 49–50; 1973: 170–175; Igbafe 1979: 13–15), was a proper means for permanent reproduction of the homoarchic *status quo* effectively preventing autocracy in the community (as a group of persons – senior age-grade members had the right and duty to participate in its government) at one time. The principle of gerontocracy dominated in administration at the community and even more so extended family levels (Bradbury 1969; Sargent 1986; Kochakova 1991). The seniors' power rested upon the idea of their maximal proximity to the group's ancestors who were thought of as true collective landowners (Talbot 1926: II, 37–38, 308; III, 737; Nwankwo 1987: 47, 50) and on whose will people's well-being was believed to depend crucially.

By mentioning the communal matrix, the kin character of central for the society religious beliefs (and at the same time ideology), etc. we come to one more aspect of the problem of the state which is more or less consciously evicted from many contemporary definitions due to the wide-spread approach to the state as merely a specific set of political institutions[17] (as well as to cultures in comparison with which the state is defined; *e.g.*, Earle [1991: 14] postulates unequivocally that '… chiefdoms must be understood as political systems'). This aspect, intrinsically interdependent with the problem of bureaucracy, is coming to the fore of the non-kin, territorial relations in the society. Although at dawn of the 20th century Schurtz (1902) and ultimately British structuralists and American Boasians demonstrated in their fieldwork-based researches as far back as in the middle of the last century that Morgan (as well as Maine [1861; 1880] before and Engels [1884/1985][18] after him) had postulated the opposition between kinship and territoriality too rigidly (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 198 ff.; Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940/1987: XIV–XX, 6–7, 10–11; Lowie 1948: 10–12, 317–318; Schapera 1956; Middleton and Tait 1958: 5; Mair 1965: 99–100)[19], I believe that the criterion as such still deserves attention. I consider it reasonable to distinguish the state in two respects: as a system of political institutions and as a type of society to which this political form becomes adequate. The latter normally is a broader notion, for on the one hand, it supplements political characteristics by and combines them with social (and through them economic) ones while on the other hand, most

frequently[20] the political system of the state kind ripens out earlier than the respective social system based on the territorial division of the citizens and composition of the polity[21]. If we attempt at characterizing a society (or 'culture' in the American cultural anthropologists' thesaurus) as a whole, we must recognize the political system as only one of its subsystems and hence label the society/culture according to its more general feature – the societal type, and this should be so not with respect to the state only but with regards to any society (see Bondarenko 1989, 1991, 1993b, 1996a; 2001: 244–250)[22].

I shall not argue either, following Maine (1861, 1880), Morgan (1877), and Engels (1884/1985), that the state in full sense begins when division by territory supplants that by kin practically completely, or in accordance with Claessen and Skalník, that the 'inchoate' but nevertheless state may be '… associated with dominant kinship, family and community ties in the field of politics…' (1978: 589) but will rather take an intermediate position. Bearing in mind the older idea that in the state 'territory' dominates over 'kinship' on the one hand, and taking into account the mentioned above achievements of the 20th century anthropologists and historians, I shall say that the state in its full sense may be fixed in the situation when territorial ties clearly (though not absolutely) dominate over those of kinship on the supra-local levels of society's complexity. This threshold is lower than that established particularly by Morgan but higher than the one sufficient for Claessen and (until a certain moment) Skalník[23]. In fact, in my view, 'the completed state' corresponds only to 'the transitional early state' in the latter scholars' scheme '… in which the administrative apparatus was dominated by appointed officials, where kinship affected only certain marginal aspects of government…' (*ibid.*)[24]. As for the state in the narrower – merely political sense, 'the limited state', I would regard as such the societies which have reached at least the level of 'the typical early state' of Claessen and Skalník (*ibid*.) – '… the kind of state in which ties of kinship were [still only] counterbalanced by those of locality, ... [but] where non-kin officials and title-holders [already] played the leading role in government administration…'[25] Note, that even highly developed pre-state cultures, like complex chiefdoms are normally characterized as essentially kin-based societies (see Earle 1997: 5).

In the meantime, what I see as a true and verifiable criterion of territorial (*i.e.*, the state in its broader, full sense) organization is the possibility for rulers to recarve arbitrarily traditional, determined by kin grouping, division of the country's territory into parts. Provided it is possible (for instance, if the central authority can unite them with others or cut into parts), one can argue that even if those social entities preserved their initial internal form, they were nothing more than administrative (and taxpaying) units in the wider context of the whole state polity administered by functionaries either appointed or confirmed outside the community – in the political center. Characteristically in states communalists are not only imposed different obligations but also given the right to sell communal land, what would undoubtedly undermine the society's background if it had really been community-based. The 3rd – 2nd millennia B.C. Near East gives especially vivid examples of the aforesaid (besides many publications on particular societies, see in general and comparative works, *e.g.*, Childe 1942: 122–123; Butinov 1967; Zak 1975: 242–265; Maisels 1987: 345–346; Iljushechkin 1990: 160–162; Jakobson 1997: 51, 60, 102, 105, 107; Diakonoff and Jakobson 1998; Baines and Yoffee 1998: 225–227; Kuzishchin 1999: 5–7). Generally speaking, in a state the supreme power does not develop the community matrix further on but rather 'on the contrary begins to restructure society' in its own image (Beliaev 2000: 194) what results in 'the encompassment of the local sphere by the state' (Tanabe 1996: 154).

Nothing of the kind can be traced in Benin. The transition from complex chiefdom to the polity of a new sort with the Second dynasty's consolidation led to significant strengthening of centripetal tendencies but nevertheless did not result in socio-political homogenization. Benin remained a 'multipolity', that is a polity within which structural elements of different socio-political types and complexity levels co-existed and interacted (see Korotayev 2000: 195). Undoubtedly, this situation's lasting for all the many centuries of the *Oba*s Benin history testifies to the fact that such polystratumness was the society's essential feature and not a manifestation of its as if 'transitional character'.

In the previous period chiefdoms and autonomous communities[26] co-existed within the complex chiefdom (though strictly

speaking, the theory presupposes that a complex chiefdom consists of simple chiefdoms only, the historical realities of Benin do not contradict but specifies it). In the time of the *Oba*s the same components – chiefdoms and autonomous communities (as before, equal to each other in terms of rights and obligations towards the supreme authorities of the time) formed parts of society of another type. Communities (including autonomous) and chiefdoms preserved all the initial characteristics of their internal organization and went on obeying the all-Benin authorities. The more powerful all-Benin political institutions were becoming the more effective their control over the relations between chiefdoms and communities was (Bradbury 1973: 149, 171). Nonetheless, the all-Benin authority did not intervene in the communities and chiefdoms' internal affairs and reminded of itself only when the interests of the whole country (associated with those of the political center) were infringed, like in the cases of dependencies' attempts to break away in the 'imperial' period of Benin history (mid-15th –19th centuries). What is especially noteworthy is that in no case those units internal composition could be changed (Bondarenko 1995a: 183–193; 2001: 257–264).

Thus, the political center had substantially limited possibilities for exercising coercive authority because violence on its side could not be considered as legitimate if it were aimed directly at the society's component units. In the meantime, the *Oba* was recognized as not merely the supreme judge but also the only legitimate lawgiver, as it was supposed that only he could relate the ancestors' will without even slight corruption (Ajisafe 1945: 17; Egharevba 1949: 11, 24; 1960: 11, 81; Eweka, E. B. 1989: 34). However, though for the Bini the ancestors were the ultimate source of laws, in reality the regulations were rooted in communal norms and traditions. Due to this new laws met no insurmountable barriers in their path from the *Oba*'s palace to communalists' houses.

In the period under consideration the country consisted not only of chiefdoms and autonomous local communities as before but also of units of a new type. This was a group of communities under the leadership of a paramount chief, like chiefdoms, but the genesis of that socio-political unit was completely different. Such units started to appear from the reign of the first *Oba* in the result of the supreme ruler's grants of communities to all-Benin chiefs and

royal relatives (Egharevba 1956: 31; Bradbury 1957: 33; 1973: 177). While chiefdom heads were more powerful the farther from the capital their estates were due to their personal enterprise, the *Oba* himself granted 'pseudochiefdom' heads more prerogatives the more distant from Benin City the territory lay (Bradbury 1973: 150; Imoagene 1990: 28). The pseudochiefdom heads were to compensate the central power's insufficient strength in the country's outskirts. Such units' number especially increased in the time of Benin's active expansion (mid-15th – early 17th centuries).

Characteristically, the *Oba*s could grant titled chiefs only those communities that did not form parts of traditional Bini chiefdoms. Those chiefs actually never resettled there and remained members of their native lineages and communities. The *Oba*s could not subdivide a chiefdom or grant it as a whole to a titled chief. Thus, the pseudochiefdoms of titled chiefs could be compiled exclusively of neighboring autonomous communities. The titled chief who was posed above them carried out in respect to those communities and their members all the same functions as the head of a chiefdom though these responsibilities were secondary for them compared to the duties inflicted on them by high all-Benin titles. Their obligations to the supreme authority were also just the same: collecting tribute, attracting communalists to corvée labor, recruiting of soldiers, etc. Pseudochiefdoms, chiefdoms, and autonomous communities heads – all were subordinated directly to the *Oba* and were regarded as equals in this respect (Egharevba 1949: 79; Bradbury 1973: 177). The *Oba*s could not subdivide or change the self-administrative system of a community or chiefdom. No chiefdom and only an autonomous community as a whole (not a part of it) could be granted to a titled chief (see Bondarenko 1994: 6–7; 1995a: 183–186, 189–190; 1995c: 140–142, 144–145, 147–150; 2001: 191–193).

So, none of the territorial units the Benin Kingdom comprised can be called administrative in the proper sense. The community and not the central authority remained the true focus of the society throughout the whole Benin history (Bondarenko 1995a, 2001).

Charles Maisels (1987, 1990) emphasized that in what he calls 'city-states', opposite to territorial 'village-states' (see also Trigger 1993), not broad descent groups (such as sibs/clans) but lineage-based extended families (households)[27] were the basic

mode of social organization. Though a city-state both as a concept and term seems to me unacceptable at least with respect to Benin (Bondarenko 1995a: 95), the latter definitely was a society of the very type Maisels and Trigger designated that way[28]. However, there is a significant difference between two subtypes of cultures falling under this category. The first of them is represented by the societies in which typical household and community were based on nuclear families (*e.g.*, Greek *poleis*) while the second subtype, and Benin is a good example at this point, is formed by those early urban societies in which community comprised households each of which was an extended family with lineages (not sibs/clans) as their cores[29]. Particularly, I have shown elsewhere that in Benin not a nuclear but extended family (organized as household integrating a number of patrilineal kindred nuclear families) was the economic and socio-cultural background of the community (Bondarenko 1995a: 136–139; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000b: 174–176). Indeed, what unites both of the subtypes is that their core social institution is household-based community of this or that type[30] but while the nuclear-family-based community is essentially and unavoidably non-kin, the extended-family-based one preserves in itself unilineal descent ties.

A useful division can be established within the extended-family households either: between those integrating monogamous and polygynous kindred nuclear families. In Benin polygyny was a norm (Dapper 1668/1975: 162; Gallwey 1893: 129; Thomas 1910: I, 15; Ajisafe 1945: 40; Mercier 1962: 299–303; Ryder 1969: 313; Ahanmisi 1992; Eweka, I. 1998: 161–162) supported by public morality and recognized as a sign of man's might and wealth (Talbot 1926: III, 429; Mercier 1962: 299; Ogieriakhi 1965; Ahanmisi 1992: 98–100). This fact is significant: theoretical research has revealed that general polygyny is rather a strong predictor of social homoarchicity at both local and supralocal levels of complexity (Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000b; Korotayev and Bondarenko 2000).

Operating with Mesopotamian evidence only, Maisels argues that kin ties within 'minimal lineage' are secondary to non-kin within the entire household (extended family). However, this is not the whole story. First, it should be underlined that a sib/clan does not form the core economic unit in any society either, as it is delocalized: for example, married women from patrilineal sibs nor-

mally participate incomparably more actively in economic activities of their husbands', not fathers and brothers' groups. Hence, clan communities reveal an interlacing of kin and territorial ties, too. Then, lineage (a group of unilineal relatives of several generations) as Maisels (1987: 348) recognizes, is the 'core' of the household and, let me stress it one more time, is kin group. Only male relatives become both the lineage and household members by birth while all the rest come to the household by means of establishing some (most often marital) relations with them, and only the lineage male members are eligible for heading the household and nuclear families within it being ranked along age lines, social in their essence. So, every extended family demonstrates a mixture of kin and territorial ties by definition but precisely the former integrate and shape the whole. Again, in order to understand an archaic society, first, we should concentrate on community rather than on its components, and second, we must recognize that the problem we are facing is not of the 'presence or absence' but of the 'more or less' sort.

This more or less criterion is still critically important if we look at the extended-family community formed by a number of households (as far as the community consisting of only one extended family and hence identical to it, as the typical, basic socioeconomic unit is a rare case in the preindustrial world[31], incredible specifically in Benin where one-family communities could be observed but very infrequently [Egharevba 1949: 11]). We can draw a line between two variants of extended-family communities. The first is that in which extended families within community do not hold kinship relations with each other (as, for instance, among the Bambara and Songhay of Western Africa [Paque 1954: 53–54; Rouch 1954: 43]). In such a situation territorial ties did predominate over kin at the community level. The second variant is represented by Benin (again, among other cultures including African [*e.g.*, McCulloch *et al.* 1954: 160; Ksenofontova 1970]) where extended families within community preserved kin ties, and thus the latter dominated in the community as a whole though in the interfamily relations they were intertwined with corporate ties of neighborhood[32]. The bigger was the community the higher was its role as a whole, compared to that of a family as its constituent part (Bradbury 1957: 31).

As has been noted above, the Bini community was of the homoarchic type as it united kindred extended families organized just this way: with the only significant hierarchy within which senior males unavoidably dominated in any social context. Community was the basic, substantial institution not socio-politically only but culturally and economically as well (Bradbury 1957: 15; 1973: 149). Historically, its formation in the late 1st millennium B.C. – early 1st millennium A.D. turned out the initial step on the way to the Benin Kingdom's appearance (see Bondarenko and Roese 1998; Bondarenko 2001: 25–39). Anthropologically, community served the model, a kind of pattern according to which the supra-communal levels were built up homoarchically too, though the transition to higher levels of socio-political organization was accompanied by significant changes. The complex society's integrity was guaranteed by principally the same various mechanisms as that of the community; ideologically, this part was played by ancestors' cult first and foremost which ascribed legitimacy to political institutions (see Bondarenko 1995a: 176–181). Collectivist, hierarchy-oriented dominant features of communalists' thinking, consciousness, Weltanschauung were adequate to, and critically supportive for, the terms and conditions of life in that society[33]. Precisely the community was not only the focus of the Benin complex society by which it was 'modeled', but also the core of the whole universe in the Bini's outlook (see Bondarenko 1995a: 24–89; 1997a).

Thus, in Benin not the supra-communal institutions were reshaping the community (what is typical of states) but *vice versa*: they were becoming similar to it. What follows from all the aforesaid is the community's key role in the determination of the character of the mental-cultural, socio-economic, and governmental subsystems of the society. The explanation for many truly and already pseudo-, quasicommunal traits and features of the 13th – 19th centuries Benin society is contained in the aforesaid, too. As the fundamental, basic institution, the community fastened all the levels of its hierarchical structure from birth till death of the Kingdom. In particular, the position of titled chiefs and the sovereign himself clearly witnesses to the kin communal principles' primary importance for the shaping of political system and institutions.

CONCLUSION: HOW TO CALL BENIN?

It looks like the character of a complex society may be predetermined by the specifics of its local (substratum) institution – the community to a greater extent than by the ways of the local and supra-local levels interaction in the process of which the relations of higher order nevertheless do originate. This is not an absolutely strict regulation at all but my (in collaboration with Andrey Korotayev) quantitative cross-cultural research has nevertheless revealed the following. When a community itself is homoarchic (as in the majority of cases when it consists of extended families), a basically communal complex society can well turn out not less homoarchic than even a pre-industrial state which in principle cannot be built up by a community matrix as no community type permits administering by professionals[34]. As for Benin, the homoarchic extended-family-based community is still alive even today being the most adequate social framework for agricultural production in the tropical forest zone (Kochakova 1970: 18–25; Bondarenko 2000d)[35]. A heterarchic community-matrix-based complex society with higher probability can appear in the milieu of the small-family (neighbor) communities, also heterarchic in their nature (Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000b; see also Blanton 1995; Bondarenko 1998c; 2000c)[36].

In the meantime, the way of the Benin Kingdom's formation was through 'likening' of the supra-communal socio-political institutions to the homoarchic community of extended families. The judicial system (see Dapper 1671: 492; Talbot 1926: III, table 19; Egharevba 1949: 11; 1960: 35; Bradbury 1957: 32–33, 41–42; Sidahome 1964: 127), the system of imposing and collecting tribute (*e.g.*, Van Nyendael 1705: 452–453; Astley 1746: 103; Bradbury 1957: 42–43; Agbontaen 1995: 122–123), etc. – all corresponded to the homoarchic character of the society. Any interaction with supra-familial authorities a common Bini had to realize through the head of his kin unit. However, the head of a family could apply directly to his community leader only. This leader, in his turn, could apply exclusively to the respective chiefdom's head (if the given community was not autonomous), and only the latter (alongside with the autonomous community leader) had the right to solicit the titled chiefs who could make the case known to the su-

preme ruler. Millar resumes in her juvenile but knowledgeable and qualified book (1997: 48–49):

> With the Oba at the top [of social pyramid], everyone in Benin had a rank. To do certain things, you had to have the correct rank. Some ranks led. Some followed. … Top to bottom, Edo [*i.e.*, Bini] chiefs, men, wives, children, and even slaves were arranged into an enormous system of ranks.

So, to sum up, Benin cannot be considered as a state in terms of either Marxism (see also Kochakova 1986: 9, 11), including 'structural Marxism', or (neo)evolutionism, or structuralism; even the existence of the monarchy does not presuppose the state character of society (Oosten 1996; Quigley 1995; Wilkinson 1999; Simonse 2002; Skalník 2002)[37]. The 13th – 19th centuries Benin form of socio-political organization can be defined as 'megacommunity', and its structure can be depicted as four concentric circles which in their totality represent an upset cone: the extended family, community, chiefdom, and megacommunity (kingdom) (for detail see Bondarenko 1994; 1995a: 276–284; 1995b, 1996b, 1998d; 2000b: 106–117; 2001: 230–263; 2004). No doubt, this is not a coincidence but a display of their interdependence that 'objective' socio-political structure was paralleled by 'subjective' Bini's vision of the world. The universe was perceived by the Bini as hierarchically structured entity, also a system of four circles: the human being – terrestrial space – the world of spirits and supreme deities – the world on the whole[38]. Community was perceived by the Bini as the socio-cultural focus of society and hence the core of the whole world, as for them their society literally was the hub of the universe.

Megacommunal institutions towered above communities and chiefdoms, established their dominance over them but in the essentially communal Benin society with lack of pronounced priority of territorial ties over kin ones, even those who governed at the supreme level could not become professional administrators. The Benin megacommunity's specificity is in organization on rather a vast territory of a complex, 'many-tier' society predominantly on the basis of transformed kin principle supplemented by a 'grain' of territorial one. This basis was inherited from the community, within which extended families preserved kin relations not only

within themselves but with each other as well, supplementing them by relations of neighborhood[39].

Indeed, 'extensive socio-political systems can be legitimized in kinship terms…' (Claessen 2000: 150). Even Stalin in the industrialized, territory-based, and heavily bureaucratized Soviet Union was unofficially but routinely used to be called 'father of the peoples' by the propaganda. In Benin political relations were 'naturally' perceived and expressed in kin terms. The spirits of royal ancestors 'spread' their authority on all the *Oba*'s subjects though only the sovereign and his relatives were their descendents. However, in Benin kinship was not only an ideology; it was much more than this – the true, 'objective' socio-cultural background of this supercomplex society.

The megacommunity was a specific type of complex homoarchic socio-political organization. On the one hand, the Benin megacommunity gives a historical example of positive (non-destructive) transformation of the complex chiefdom. It has repeatedly been argued (by Webb [1975], Peebles and Kus [1977], Wright [1977], Carneiro [1981], Cohen [1981], M. E. Smith [1985], Spencer [1987], Earle [1991], D. Anderson [1994] and others) that a typical fortune of a chiefdom (including complex) is eventual disintegration into its initial components while only some of them turn out to be able to transform into states. The fate of all but one numerous Bini chiefdoms of the mid – late 1st – early 2nd millennia (Obayemi 1976: 242; Darling 1984: I, 119–124, 130–142) confirmed this regularity (see Bondarenko 1999: 27–32; 2000b: 95–97; 2001: 63–71; 2004: 333–335, 346–347; Roese and Bondarenko 2003: 38–40), and only Benin showed that becoming a state is not the unique possibility for a chiefdom-based polity to escape disintegration by making an evolutionary step forward.

On the other hand, this type of organization was alternative to statehood, for it is clear that in many significant respects (economic, social, cultural) Benin was not less developed than the majority of the societies labeled as 'transitional early' (Claessen and Skalník 1978: 23, 589–593, 641) or 'archaic' (Feinman and Marcus 1998) states. In particular, the Benin megacommunity was not inferior to many states – societies in which bureaucracy is present, including the so-called 'transitional early states' characterized by the Early

State concept adepts as the ones in which territorial ('social') ties dominate over kin (Claessen and Skalník 1978: 23, 589), and as one of which Benin is even sometimes attributed (Kochakova 1994), erroneously, as I believe I have managed to show above.

Thus, alternativity exists not only between heterarchic and homoarchic societies but also within the respective types (Bondarenko 2001: 251–263; Bondarenko *et al.* 2003: 5–8). In particular, the early state, homoarchic by the very definition given by the concept's Founding Fathers – Claessen and Skalník[40], 'competes' not only with a variety of complex decentralized heterarchic socio-political systems (for examples see, *e.g.*, contributions in Ehrenreich *et al.* 1995; Korotayev 1995; 1996; Thevenot 1996: Ch. 7; Possehl 1998; Schoenfelder 2003), but also with some forms of socio-political organization like megacommunity, not less complex, not less centralized, and not less homoarchic than the early state itself.

NOTES

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[1] Crumley (1995: 3) insists just on 'the addition of the term heterarchy to the vocabulary of *power* relations…' (my emphasis) and sees the prerequisite for heterarchic socio-political organization in the diversity of sources of power, as far as her concept is concentrated precisely on the society's political subsystem. Discussing the 'heterarchic state', Crumley in this respect does not differ from the majority of contemporary more traditionally' thinking theorists who 'argue that the evolution of social complexity needs to be understood first and foremost as a political process' (Earle 1994: 940) and also tend to look at the state, more or less exclusively, as a specific form of political organization (see below). However, Crumley does see power relations (heterarchic and otherwise) not as a thing in itself but in their interaction with, and dependence on the social, mental (values system), and ecological milieu and legitimately builds her concept on this base.

[2] In the meantime, Pearson (2001) has recently attempted at employing both of the respective approaches – the heterarchy (but, of course, not heterarchy/homoarchy) and network/corporate strategies ones for a case study – of state formation on the Okinawa islands.

[3] In particular, many (though not all [Schapera 1956: 208]) structuralists of the mid-20th century, being influenced by Radcliffe-Brown, tended to discredit the right to exercise coercive authority as a feature typical of state organization arguing that it characterizes any political system (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940/1987: XIV f.; Mair 1965: 101–102). Marxists and neoevolutionists do not hesitate to assign 'ripe', not incipient coercion as a characteristic of the state only. For Marxists it is the core of their 'class approach' to the phenomenon (though in anthropology in general this idea is rooted owe to Max Weber's [1922/1947; 1978] concepts of 'political community' and 'legitimation of power' to a non less degree than due to the classics of Marxism's writings). Meanwhile neoevolutionists disagree with each other whether already the origin of the state is rooted in coercion either or whether the pre-state was entering the historical stage as an all-benefiting institution which became coercive just at the very moment of transformation into 'true' state (the famous Fried – Service controversy).

[4] If these characteristics are sufficient, is another point to which I will return below, in the course of the article.

[5] For example, see the following definitions (my emphases): 'Chiefdoms are redistributional societies with a permanent *central* agency of coordination' (Service 1962/1971: 134); chiefdom is 'a polity that organizes *centrally* a regional population in the thousands' (Earle 1991: 1); '… a chiefdom is an aggregate of villages under the *centralized* rule of a paramount political leader. This is the basic structural nature of a chiefdom' (Carneiro 1998: 19); chiefdoms are 'societies with *centralized* but not internally specialized authority' (Spencer 1998: 5; following [Wright 1977: 381]). This is even more so in the case of complex chiefdom (*e.g.*, Earle 1978: 173–185; Pauketat 1994; Johnson and Earle 2000: 301–303). As Timothy Earle resumes in his prominent review article (1987: 289), '… centrality is the clearest indicator of chiefdoms' (for general discussion of chiefdoms as centralized polities see Beliaev *et al.* 2001). Furthermore, even in simple societies power may be centralized by a 'big man' (Sahlins 1963) or a 'chieftain' who thus establishes '… *centralized* political leadership that operates from time to time among autonomous village societies but that is generally short-lived', so the term 'chieftain' '… designates explicitly the form of *centralized* leadership…' (Redmond 1998: 3). The variety of non-state centralized forms of societies and leadership types is by no means at all limited to those mentioned above.

[6] A remarkable reformulation of his previous distinction between 'the decentralized stratified society' and 'centralized archaic state' (Kristiansen 1991: 19–21).

[7] Symptomatically, Kristiansen remarks that 'Similar structures may develop in pastoral societies in their interaction with state societies…' (1998: 46) while by now specialists in pastoral cultures have established a well-grounded tradition of assessing most complex pastoral, especially nomadic, societies as clearly and explicitly homoarchic (in my terms) explaining it just as an outcome of their interaction with agriculturalists' states (*e.g.*, Barfield 1992; Khazanov 1994; Kradin 2003; for more detail see Kradin 2002). On the other hand, just those pastoral societies which were not involved into active interaction with autochthonous agricultural (or imposed colonial and post-colonial) states normally remained politically 'egalitarian' or 'tribal', as specialists (*e.g.*, Irons 1994; Salzman 1999: 35–41)

point out. The changes in pastoral societies' systems of leadership under the state's pressure one can observe nowadays are also characteristic: introduction of private landownership reshapes them in the direction of homoarchization (see *e.g.*, for the East African Maasai: Kituyi 1990; Horn 1998). It is also important to note with respect to Kristiansen's arguments that even the most complex pastoral societies are now not often regarded as states; rather they are viewed as very complex but nevertheless non-state societies (labeled by Kradin [*e.g.*, 2000a: 279–282; 2000b: 296–299] as 'supercomplex chiefdoms'). Kristiansen writes that one of his intentions is to substitute for 'the decentralized archaic state' the notion of 'military democracy' (1998: 46). This is remarkable either: since the 19th century (Morgan 1877; Engels 1884/1985) the latter notion has been reserved by (neo)evolutionists and especially Marxists for complex heterarchic 'pre-state' societies (*e.g.*: Averkieva 1968; Khazanov 1968; Pershits 1986) including Bronze Age European (*e.g.*: Otto and Horst 1982; Bockisch 1987). So, here Kristiansen proves once again the irrelevance of his comparison of the European Bronze Age societies with the pastoral cultures he means, but what is much more important is that he exemplifies unwillingly that centralization and heterarchic social organization do not exclude each other though heterarchy may predict a lower degree of centralization than homoarchy does. Kristiansen's appeals to the pastoral comparative data and the notion of military democracy remained much more reasonable till the moment when he decided to substitute 'the decentralized stratified society' for 'decentralized archaic state'.

[8] Note however, that implicitly the idea of professional administration as a distinctive feature of the state was influentially singled out in anthropology rather long before Weber, particularly by Morgan (1877; separation of power from the populace as the second of the state's three distinctive features) being then developed in his vein by Engels (1884/1985) and – already in the mid-20th century – by neoevolutionists and Marxists (mainly American and Soviet respectively).

[9] Chronological problems are among most intricate in the study of Benin history. None of the dates prior to the European written sources appearance in the late 15th – 16th centuries and the majority of dates after that is more than conventional. In particular, on debates around the date of almost the most important event in Benin history, the change of the First dynasty by the Second (what entailed serious socio-anthropological consequences) see Bondarenko 2003a: 74–77.

[10] For general descriptions and detailed analyses of the Benin titles system see: Read 1904; Egharevba 1956; 1960: 78–80; Bradbury 1957: 35–44; Roese 1988; 1993; Eweka, E. B. 1992; Bondarenko 1993a: 158–165; 1995a: 231–257; 2001: 212–229; Roese and Bondarenko 2003: 318–331. The last of these publication also see for comprehensive account of Benin history from the earliest times till the kingdom's conquest by the British in 1897, while the book by Bradbury remains unsurpassed in the field of the Bini historical ethnography.

[11] I accept the 'general' definition of community given by Murdock and Wilson (1972: 255) who wrote:

> We assume that there is and must be a unit of significant social interaction beyond the family. It follows that it is possible to identify this unit as the community for each society. The main

> criteria for determining the community are: (1) it is the maximal number of people who normally reside together in face-to-face association; (2) the members interact with some regularity; (3) it is a significant focus of social identity for the members. … In general, we chose the unit that seemed to be the focus of the most significant regular interaction and identification.

Their 'specific' approach to defining the community in the political context 'as the lowest level of political integration' is also taken into account (Murdock and Wilson 1972: 256). In my view, the emphasis on the fact that 'autonomous communities' have never been truly autonomous but initially formed parts of wider systems of intercommunal interaction recently made by Stephen Kowalewski (2003), does not disregard the concept of community in general though may profitably shift researchers' attention from studying it 'as such' to doing it in a much more historical context, in light of its place in a broader cultural milieu. In fact, this discussion is an 'echo' of the furious debate which is in full swing in present-day archaeology: between the adherents of the approaches which can be labeled as world-system ('regional-interaction-based') and particularistic ('local-community-oriented') ones (see in particular, Kristiansen 1998 *vs.* Harding 2000). My belief is that these approaches do not contradict but rather compliment each other (compare with the debate between the world-system and civilization approaches adherents and its estimation by the present author: Bondarenko 2003b) and hence, as has just been argued, the concept of community still remains valid.

[12] Oranmiyan's wife, the mother of the first *Oba* Eweka I, is said to be Bini. Bini is the biggest Edo-speaking ethnic group; the names 'Bini' and 'Edo' are quite often used as synonyms what is of course inexact.

[13] Sigmund Freud (1911/1923: 63) showed a very keen insight by writing that taboo 'not only distinguishes kings and exalt them over all common mortals but also turns their life into unbearable torture and burden and inflicts on them chains of slavery much heavier than on their subjects'.

[14] The episode Egharevba relates happened in the 1890s.

[15] However, it must be stressed that what was sacralized were not concrete *Oba*s as personalities but the very power and institution of the supreme ruler (Nkanta and Arinze n.d.: 5).

[16] Just due to this in the situation when ancestors' cult was the central form of religion in Benin both at the local and uppermost levels of complexity, priesthood was never organized in a distinct, economically and politically influential corporation (Roth 1903/1968: 50; Sharevskaja 1957: 205; Dike 1959: 13; Kochakova 1986: 145–146, 151; Bondarenko 1995a: 270) like in supercomplex societies which religious systems, especially on the highest complexity level, concentrated on anthropomorphic deities or God (Egypt, Mesopotamia, medieval Europe, Aztecs, etc.; the most remarkable exception is the Islamic world where those called 'people of religion' cannot be regarded as priests proper). Though people for whom priestly responsibilities were primary could have existed since the First dynasty time (Egharevba 1960: 2), Benin priests performed either cults minor in their importance (see Roese and Reichel 1990: 390–391, 393–394) or assisted the *Oba* with his supreme priests duties' performance (*e.g.*, Talbot 1926: II, 308;

Egharevba 1949: 30; 1956: 11; 1960: 11, 79–82; Bradbury 1957: 34, 40, 54, 55; 1959: 191; Palau Marti 1960: 79–80; Omijeh 1971: 118; Ayeni 1975: 38–47; Blackmun 1984: II, 366–369 *et al.*; Imoagene 1990: 22). In Benin people did not need professional mediators between them and venerated ancestors: the cult was personal, kin in nature and presupposed no supreme or esoteric knowledge inaccessible to all. In this society there was also no ideology, popular or official, for imposing of which professional priests could be instrumental. The hierarchy of mediators between a person and ancestors was not spiritual but purely social: a common Bini venerated the ancestors of his own, the head of a family or community – of all the respective units members, finally the *Oba* appeared in the role of the supreme priest as he, the father of all the country's citizens, performed rites of the cult of royal ancestors, hence the all now living Bini's forefathers. (However, it must be noted that one of the changes that accompanied the extension of communal matrix through chiefdom to the all-Benin level was that the sovereign could well be not the senior in his lineage. In this case his political seniority in the country looked more significant than his not that high position in his own kin group).

[17] However, for Morgan (1877) (who is *volens nolens* a predecessor of all the subsequent theorists and a source of inspiration for not few of them) just this very aspect was of primary importance in comparison with the form of political organization as such.

[18] In the Marxist theory the transition from kin to territorial ties has begun to serve as an essential precondition for social classes formation prior to what the rise of the state was declared impossible, as the state was seen as political organization predestined for guaranteeing the exploitative class' dominance in society. Particularly, Engels (1884/1985: 198–199) wrote:

> As far as the state arose due to the need to keep in check the opposite of classes; as far as at the same time it arose in the very clashes of those classes, according to the general rule it is the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class which with the help of the state becomes the politically dominant class as well, and thus acquires new means for suppression and exploitation of the oppressed class.

Most rigidly this postulate was formulated by Lenin: 'The state appears where and when the division of society into classes appears' (1917/1974: 67). In fact, hardly not the main point of a Marxist social scientist's departure from the camp of 'orthodoxes' to that of 'creative Marxists' was his or her desire to reconcile this dogma with historical and ethnographic facts or even to overcome it. Particularly, in the West this led to the appearance of 'structural Marxism' with its tendency '… to reverse the causal relationship between base and superstructure…' (Sanderson 2003: 180), while in the Soviet Union the meaningless euphemism for the Early State, *ranneklassovoe obshchestvo* ('early-class society') was invented (see Bondarenko 1991). On the absence of social classes in the Marxist sense in Benin see: Kalous 1970; Kochakova 1986; Bondarenko 1995a.

[19] These mid-20th century anthropologists provided conclusive arguments for the importance of territorial ties in primitive (non-state) cultures. As a result, already

in 1965 Lewis had good reasons to argue that 'The fundamentally territorial character of social and political association in general is indeed usually taken for granted, and has been assumed to apply as much to segmentary lineage societies as to other types of society' (Lewis 1965: 96). On the other hand, historians and anthropologists also showed that the typically non- and originally pre-state institutions of kinship could preserve some importance in state societies including medieval European (*e.g.*, Bloch 1939–1940/1961: 141 ff.; Lewis 1965: 99–101; Genicot 1968; Duby 1970; Claessen and Skalník 1978: 22, 589, 641; Korotayev and Obolonkov 1989; Tainter 1990: 29–30). In fact, it has eventually turned out that the 'kin *vs.* territory' problem is that of measure and not of almost complete presence or absence although the general socio-historical tendency is really towards gradual substitution of kin-based institutions by territory-based ones. Fried (1960/1970: 692–693) was very accurate indeed postulating that the state is organized not on a non-kin but 'supra-kin' basis.

[20] But not always: the area giving probably the most important (in the historical long-run) exceptions to the rule is Europe, in some parts of which unilineal descent groups disappeared at early stages of history being substituted by nuclear family and neighbor (territorial) community. For example, in Greece it happened by the Dark Age time (Andreev 1976: 74–78; Frolov 1988: 79–80; on *genos* as not sib or clan in anthropological terms [Lowie 1920; Ember and Ember 1999: 349, 353] see: Smith, R. C. 1985: 53), in Latium before Rome was founded and royal authority in it established in the 8th century B.C. (*e.g.*, Dozhdev 2004; see here also the criticism on the concept of *gens* as clan) and in Scandinavia by the close of the Bronze Age after in this sense transitory period (from about 2600 B.C.) of the lineage and extended family dominance (Earle 1997: 25–26, 163; Anderson, C. E. 1999: 14–15). This paved the way to the territorial organization's formation prior to that of well-developed bureaucratic apparatus (Kristiansen 1998: 45, 46) and generally speaking, contributed significantly to the 'European phenomenon', 'European miracle' – the modern European civilization's appearance. Korotayev (2003; 2004: 89–107, 119–137) has demonstrated convincingly that 'deep Christianization' promotes the rise of communal (and, in the long run, supracommunal) democracy by crushing the unilineal descent organization (alongside with a number of other potentially democratizing innovations like insistence on monogamy [Korotayev and Bondarenko 2000]). I think the reverse statement could also be true: deep Christianization is easier achieved in the social milieu characterized by absence or weakening of unilineal descent organization. Note also that Christianity is heavily rooted in the ancient Jewish monotheism while the Old Testament prophets entered the stage and started teaching in the situation of the sib organization's gradual weakening (though not disappearance) after the Israelite Kingdom's formation (Nikol'skij 1914: 385–415; Jakobson 1997: 351–369). It is also reasonable to suppose that first, that was really weakening of the unilineal descent organization and not the territorial organization's formation as such what contributed to the 'European miracle''s birth, and second, territorial organization is nevertheless an independent variable. Both of these propositions are proved by the late ancient – modern West and Central Asian, North African, and even modern European politically democratic tribal cultures in which one can observe territorial division, unilineal descent including clan (sib)

organization, and non-Christian (nowadays predominantly Muslim) religion at one time (*e.g.*, Evans-Pritchard 1949; Whitaker 1968; Irons 1975; Korotayev 1990). The second proposition is also confirmed, for instance, by North American evidence from tribal societies with distinctive unilineal descent groups (*e.g.*, Morgan 1851; Lowie 1935; Dräger 1968). Finishing one of his recent articles, Yuri Berezkin (2000: 223) asks the reader: 'Would it be too bold to suggest that it was… lack of, or underdevelopment of, a clan-and-moiety system that contributed to the more important role of personality that, in turn, had hindered the development of hierarchies?' Indeed, it would not.

[21] As Allen Johnson and Timothy Earle (2000: 304) put it,

> Whereas chiefdoms vest leadership in generalized regional institutions, in states the increased scope of integration requires specialized regional institutions to perform the tasks of control and management. … Along with this increasing elaboration of the ruling apparatus comes increasing stratification. Elites are now unrelated by kinship to the populations they govern…

[22] In particular, such significant for the development of anthropological thought theories as those of evolutionists (from Maine to Engels), of the French sociological (Durkheim, Mauss) and British structuralist (Evans-Pritchard, Fortes, Mair, etc.) schools, of substantivists in economic anthropology beginning with Polanyi, are based (see Earle 1994: 947) on understanding of societal forms, including the state, which involves both political and socio-economic characteristics. Famous and still influential neoevolutionist concepts (Sahlins 1960; Service 1962/1971; 1975; Fried 1967; Carneiro 1970) also derive, more or less openly, from this premise. In the meantime, for instance, the Archaic State concept elaborated recently by a group of archaeologists headed by Gary Feinman and Joyce Marcus does limit the notion of the state to a kind of political organization as the state is seen by them merely '… as a political or governmental unit…' (Marcus and Feinman 1998: 4). The same is true with the Early State concept (Claessen and Skalník 1978). Having eventually been developed into a truly organic combination of evolutionist and structuralist postulates (Claessen 2000), it nevertheless also reduces the notion of the state to its political aspect (see Kradin 1991: 283; Bondarenko 1998b: 19; 2001: 243–244; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000c: 14–15) what could give reason to some of its adherents to designate Benin as an early state (*e.g.*, Kochakova 1986, 1996b; Shifferd 1987) precisely due to the fact that this concept not only reduces the state to a specific system of political institutions but also rightly recognizes that as a rule the political subsystem develops towards the state more rapidly than the socio-economic one. However, characterization of Benin as belonging to the highest type of the early state – 'transitional' is improper in any case (see below). Besides, it must not but be noted that though the Early State concept is still most well-known and best developed in its initial modification, its main proponent, Henri Claessen in one of his latest publications (2003: 161) declares openly that 'A state is a specific kind of *social* organization, expressing a specific type of social order in a society' (my emphasis). Precisely this vision (which also naturally presupposes the political aspect of social system's embracing) coinsides completely with that of the present author's and testifies to what in fact the whole history of the Early State concept does: that this valuable

concept possesses a considerable potential for further elaboration and correction, what its adherents with Claessen in the head are doing quite successfully for already over a quarter of a century (on the concept's history, evolution, and prospects see Oosten and van de Velde 1994; Kochakova 1996a, 1999; Bondarenko 1998b; Kradin 1998).

[23] In his recent critical reevaluation of his own (and Claessen's) Early State concept Peter Skalník (2002: 6) recognizes explicitly that 'the early state in a number of concrete cases but also by its theory of inchoate (incipient) state, "swallowed" chiefdom as an independent category'.

[24] In particular, Claessen and Skalník (1978: 593) attribute as transitional early states the following societies from their sample: China (late 2nd – early 1st millennia B.C.), Maurya (4th – 2nd centuries B.C.), France (10th – 11th centuries), Aztecs (15th – 16th centuries), Kuba (19th century), and Jimma (19th – 20th centuries [till 1932]).

[25] In the Claessen and Skalník's sample (1978: 593) the limited state (the typical early state in their own thesaurus) is represented by Egypt (first half of the 1st millennium B.C.), Scythia (6th – 3rd centuries B.C.), Iberia (6th century B.C. – 1st century A.D.), Axum (1st – 6th centuries), Angkor (9th – 13th centuries), Mongolia (13th – 14th centuries), Incas (15th – 16th centuries), Kachari (17th – 18th centuries), and Yoruba (19th century). To these, for example, the Polish state of the 9th – 11th centuries was added by Tymowski (1996). For 'the inchoate early state' which I cannot regard as state in any sense at all, Claessen and Skalník (1978: 589) postulate not only kinship ties domination but also 'a limited existence of full-time specialists…' that are thus 'rare' in such societies (1978: 23), *i.e.*, do not form the objectively absolutely necessary and hence non-removable core of the government. At this point, it is also worth noting Aidan Southall's (2000: 150) remark: 'Claessen and Skalník (1978) distinguished inchoate, typical and transitional early states… The segmentary state conforms most nearly to the inchoate state, but Claessen considered the segmentary state as I defined it not a state at all'. Hence, in my turn, I would not label the societies Southall means as states even more so. In fact, the cultures fitting Southall's segmentary state model (1956, 1988, 1999) might be regarded as typological predecessors of societies like Benin. In Benin ritual suzerainty of the sovereign also exceeded his abilities to control the country's periphery in practical terms (see Bondarenko 2001: 183–184) but the crucial difference between say, 'Southall's' Alur and Benin was that within the former the component units could exercise legitimate force and even secede from the wider polity to join another while in the Benin case all this was impossible, at least within 'Benin proper' – the political and ethno-cultural core of the Benin 'Empire' of the mid-15th – 19th centuries. The degree of centralization in Benin was significantly, qualitatively higher than in the Alur society.

[26] *I.e.*, the communities which did not form parts of any chiefdom within the Benin Kingdom.

[27] Maisels denotes sibs/clans as 'lineages' or 'conical clans' (*e.g.*, Chinese) while lineages proper he calls 'minimal lineages'.

[28] In fact, Trigger (1993) explicitly discusses Benin together with neighboring historically and culturally related to her 'Yoruba city-states'.

[29] Thus at this level of analysis it is incorrect to equate the Sumerian *é* and Akkadian *bîtum* with the Greek *oikos* as Maisels (following Gelb [1979: 12–13])

does, paying no attention to the difference between the two types of households I emphasize. Mesopotamian households clearly are of the second type distinguished by me what becomes evident from Maisels's own description above all, while the *oikos* was individual families uniting household as back as in the Dark Ages (Andreev 1976: 74–78; Frolov 1988: 79–80) which later could unite for political and economic reasons in *artificial* kinship units called *genē* (Fine 1983: 35–36). Watson's (1978: 156) reasoning (cited by Maisels [1987: 350]) that already in the 6th millennium B.C. Near East '… the basic residential unit… was… a nuclear family…' (see also Byrd 2000) does not discredit what has been argued just above: in anthropological terms, this only means that not 'joint' ('large') but 'small' *extended* family was the typical *residential* unit. However, in more essential respects – economic, social, and political, extended families had clear priority over their nuclear parts (see, *e.g.*, Diakonoff 1985; Diakonoff *et al.* 1989: 57–72).

[30] Characteristically, Dmitri Dozhdev, criticizing the traditional view on institutional evolution of early Rome in light of the sib/clan theory, writes in introduction to his article (2004: 389) as follows:

> The below picture of the formation of the Roman state, the suggested legal evaluations and the attempt to find out a continuous line that determines its specific features as a version of the political development are based on the recognition of the civil community (*civitas*) as the phenomenological and conceptual kernel of the problem. Rome was founded in the urban epoch.

[31] Among such rare cases there are medieval Thailand, Laos, and the Malabar Coast of India (Alaev 2000: 129).

[32] In the ancient world, for instance, Sumer gave examples of communities of both types: with kin and with non-kin extended families forming them (Chipirova 1988: 7).

[33] Treating multiple in Benin art compositions with *Oba* in the center flanked by dignitaries depicted smaller than the sovereign is as 'a classic hierarchical composition', Herbert Cole (1981: 12) rightly pointed out '… its great value in Benin thought, not only as a socio-political statement, but as a spiritual, mythic, and psychological metaphor as well'.

[34] Indeed, this does not mean the community's disappearance (see above). The same is true with such other basically non-state social units as, for example, lineages. However, within the state structure they, being in essence non-bureaucratic (as well as communities) cannot and do not form the matrix for the uppermost level institutions' building up as lineage norms (loyalty to lineage members) are incompatible with state norms (Fallers 1956: 12 f, 277 f; see also, *e.g.*, Lewis's [1965: 100] compressed but instructive characteristics of the Zulu and Southeast Chinese socio-political systems based on works by Gluckman [1940] and Freedman [1958]). As for communities, they usually decay only in the process of the wider society's transition to capitalism (as well as early institutions of kinship [Parsons 1960; 1966]). Examples of the community's disappearance in agricultural societies are seldom, Egypt from the Middle Kingdom on being the most prominent one (Diakonoff *et al.* 1989: I, 143; Diakonoff and Jakobson 1998: 26–27). However, even there 'it is possible… that the ancient Egyptian peasantry, which for the most part seems to have continued to live in traditional villages long after

the Old Kingdom, may have preserved significant aspects of communal social life…' (Trigger 1985: 59). Besides, '… probably in some respect whole Egypt was considered as a community with the pharao as its leader, and as not a neigbor [community] but a kin one…' (Diakonoff and Jakobson 1998: 27; see also McNeill 1963: 72).

[35] Just its stability permits extrapolation of ethnographic evidence on earlier periods of the Bini social history with high degree of plausibility. Robert Bradbury, the greatest classic of ethnographic and historical anthropological Benin studies, especially made this point (Bradbury 1964).

[36] The most vivid example of complex society based on the neighbor community matrix is given by the ancient Greek *polis*. It also shows that no state can be based on the community matrix of any kind: just because no community permits the existence of bureaucracy, the *polis* was lacking it either, and hence was not state (*e.g.*, Berent 2000; Marcus and Feinman [1998: 8] remark correctly that '… many Aegean specialists do not believe the *polis* was a state at all…'). Even tyranny never changed this situation and in fact, served a temporal means for further strengthening of those fundamental heterarchic features of the *polis* when they were challenged this or that way. Not by chance tyrannies were not long-lived and left the historical stage as soon as they fulfilled their mission (*e.g.*, Andrewes 1956; Mossé 1969; Vliet 1987; Tumans 2002: 285–369). In his review of the 2nd edition of Murray's 'Early Greece' (1993) Karpjuk points out that 'in the author's opinion, the reason for the appearance of tyrannic regimes in Archaic Greece was the *demos*' need in leaders for the sruggle with aristocracy, who due to this acquired such great importance in this transitional period', and then remarks that 'Murrey's viewpoint on the reasons of appearance and social roots of tyranny is quite traditional' (Karpjuk 1994: 193, 194). Indeed, in some cases, Athens being most important, those were just tyrants who paved the way from aristocratic political regime 'to government by the *demos*, democracy' (Finley 1981: 104). (The latter as political regime exemplifying 'the ideal representation of a power *heterarchy*' [Crumley 1995: 3; emphasis in the original; see also Vliet 2003] nevertheless must not be identified with heterarchy as a social system: in particular, the unavoidably heterarchic *polis* social framework admitted not only democratic but also aristocratic and oligarchic political forms). Bouzek (1990: 172) is right both in his irony about endless academic debates and in representation of the Greeks' own distinction between their *poleis* and other peoples' states: 'The Greeks had fewer problems than we have with the definition of the state. They saw kingdoms and kings in all parts of the world where they met one ruler, and not the council of a *polis* or ethnos'. However, in the anthropological perspective the problem with attribution of the *polis* as the state is not in the fact that typically it is not a monarchy (indeed, we do know a great number of republican states, for example, modern) but in the fact that the Greek *polis* (on the contrary to the Roman *civitas*' at transition from Republic to Empire [Hopkins 1968; Shtaerman 1989; Blois 1994]) never gave rise to bureaucracy which (besides many other deeds) could divide the polity's territory arbitrarily, ignoring the natural division which had resulted from local communities' synoecism as the most frequent means for the *polis*' very formation. Furthermore, for Greeks the *polis* was not a political or territorial unit first and foremost but a self-governing (*i.e.*, never bureaucracy-governed!) collectivity

of equal in rights citizens (*e.g.*, Finley 1963: 56; 1982: 3–4; Hansen 1991: 58–59; Strogetskij 1995). Attempts to avoid these facts and substantiate the viewpoint at the *polis* as a 'non-bureaucratic state' (*e.g.*, Vliet 1987, 1994, 2003; for the most recent one see Grinin 2004; note that Grinin's attempt to avoid professional full-time administration as state's feature *sine qua non* disavows his own definition of the state given elsewhere [1997: 20; 2000: 190] in which this point presents) seem to contradict the well-grounded idea of the state's intimate relatedness to the presence of bureaucracy. In the meantime, the recognition of the *polis* as a non-state system does not lead to the conclusion that the state cannot be democratic or non-monarchical (what, for example, Grinin actually erroneously equates with democracy). First, at least today in many countries, mainly in the West but not only there, one can observe both democracy and bureaucracy. Second, though it goes without saying that monarchy is the most wide-spread form of political regime in pre-industrial state societies (see Claessen and Skalník 1978: 535–596), history has seen instances of non-monarchical bureaucracies yet in ancient and medieval times. For example, in oligarchic Venice from 1297 and till Napoleon's occupation in 1797 Great Council consisting of adult males of specified elite families selected and elected among its members functionaries including the head of polity (*doge*) without any feedback from the populace. In fact, from the viewpoint of society as a whole, that was appointment by a small group of people, only to which the appointees were responsible. Due to this they functioned as bureaucrats in many respects pointed out by Weber (see, *e.g.*, Romano 1987; Zannini 1993). In contrast, even in so-called oligarchic *poleis* the whole collectivity of citizens remained the administrators' (*magistrates*') elector at least in principle, though like in Venice and contrary to democratic *poleis*, not all the citizens were eligible for being elected. To be sure: in oligarchic *poleis* the circle of competent citizens was narrower than in democratic and only those belonging to an even narrower circle – oligarchy, could be elected. But oligarchs did not elect *magistrates* themselves like the Venice Great Council members did. *Magistrates* were elected by citizens of the oligarchs number (Jajlenko 1983: 165–173). The *polis* also should not be considered as a case when transition from (mainly) kin-based to (predominantly) non-kin social division outstrips the formation of bureaucracy, as first, there was no such a transition because it was inherited from the preceding incipient simple society (*e.g.*, Andreev 1976; Frolov 1988) and second, bureaucracy never formed in *poleis* prior to their integration into the Macedonian empire and the kingdoms which appeared on Alexander the Great power's debris, when bureaucracy was just imposed on *poleis*. Nevertheless they mainly preserved internal autonomy and typical non-bureaucratic system of government as a means of its realization and thorough support (*e.g.*, Bikerman 1938/1985: 131–135; Allen 1983: 75, 109 *et al.*; Diakonoff *et al.* 1989: II, 322–330, 324–345). All in all, it is not so surprising that the *polis* is rarely considered in general works on social evolution (Blanton *et al.* 1996: 2; Marcus and Feinman 1998: 8–9), especially in those written by the scholars thinking within the unilinear typology paradigm.

[37] The same as non-monarchical form of government does not inevitably predict a society's non-state nature (see note 31).

[38] Besides, every person was believed to have four soles that demonstrated different degree of separateness from his or her physical membrane (Bradbury 1973: 271–282).

[39] As a megacommunity I shall also designate, for instance, the Bamum Kingdom of the late 16th/early 17th – 19th centuries in present-day Cameroon which as a whole represented an extension up to the supercomplex level of the lineage principles and organization forms, so the society acquired the shape of 'maximal lineage' (Tardits 1980). Outside Africa megacommunities may be recognized in Indian societies of the late 1st millennium B.C. – first centuries A.D. Naturally, differing in many respects from the Benin pattern, they nevertheless fit the main distinctive feature of megacommunity as social type: integration of a supercomplex (exceeding the complex chiefdom level) society on community (and hence non-state) basis. In particular, Samozvantsev (2001) describes those societies as permeated by communal orders notwithstanding the difference in socio-political organization forms. 'The principle of communality', he argues, was the most important factor of social organization in India during that period. In the south of India this situation lasted much longer, till the time of the Vijayanagara Empire – the mid-14th century (Palat 1987; Stein, B. 1989). A number of other examples of supercomplex societies in which 'the supracommunal political structure was shaped according to the community type' (similar to the Bini type) is provided by the 1st millennium A.D. Southeast Asia – by such societies as *e.g.*, Funan and possibly (see Mudar 1999) Dvaravati (Rebrikova 1987: 159–163). Apart from all the rest, these examples show that megacommunity may be seen among not only 'city-based' societies like Benin, but among 'territorial' ones as well.

[40] The definition they give is the following one:

> The early state is a centralized socio-political organization for the regulation of social relations in a complex, stratified society divided into at least two basic strata, or emergent social classes – *viz.* the rulers and the ruled – whose relations are characterized by political dominance of the former and tributary obligations of the latter, legitimized by a common ideology of which reciprocity is the basic principle (Claessen and Skalník 1978: 640; see also pp. 533–596, 637–650).

Note that the homoarchic character of the early state is also stressed *e.g.*, in its such heavily criticized but still influential 'classical' concepts as those of Elman Service (1962/1971; 1975), Morton Fried (1960/1970; 1967), and Robert Carneiro (1970), notwithstanding the significant difference in those scholars' general theoretical premises: seeing the state power as basically either consensual or coercive.

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