### Dmitri M. BONDARENKO

Born in Moscow, then the Soviet Union and now the Russian Federation, in 1968 holds his M. A. in World History, Anthropology, Education, and English from the Lomonosov Moscow University and Ph.D. and Dr. Sc. degrees in World History and Social (Cultural) Anthropology from the Russian Academy of Sciences. Dmitri Bondarenko is a Senior Researcher and the Chair of the Department of Cultural Anthropology of the Center for Civilizational and Regional Studies and of the Institute for African Studies (both under the Russian Academy of Sciences) and a Full Professor with the Center of Social Anthropology of the Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow. Dmitri headed academic expeditions in the African states of Tanzania and Nigeria. Bondarenko has published and lectured worldwide; by present he is the author of about 200 publications (including 5 monographs and 24 edited or co-edited volumes) on a variety of anthropological and historical topics with primary focuses on theoretical issues and Africa south of the Sahara. He is the European Academy's Prize for young CIS scholars winner of 1997 (for the monograph *Benin nakanune pervykh kontaktov s evropejtsami: chelovek, obshchestvo, vlast'* [Benin on the Eve of the First Contacts with Europeans: Person, Society, Authority]). Dmitri is a full member of the European Association of Social Anthropologists and Societé des Africanistes. Bondarenko is a co-founder and co-editor of *Social Evolution and History*, an English-language academic journal. Dmitri Bondarenko's personal page in the Internet that contains more information about him and his research (particularly, the list of publications) can be accessed at the address http://civreg.ru/english/personal/bondarenko.html.

**D. M. Bondarenko**

**HOMOARCHY**

### A PRINCIPLE
### OF CULTURE'S ORGANIZATION



**The 13th – 19th Centuries Benin Kingdom as a Non-State Supercomplex Society**

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URSS

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**Moscow: URSS, 2006**

**Bondarenko Dmitri M.**

**Homoarchy: A Principle of Culture's Organization. The 13th – 19th Centuries Benin Kingdom As a Non-State Supercomplex Society**. – Moscow: Editorial URSS. – 184 p.

Until quite recently, cultural evolution has commonly been regarded as the permanent teleological move to a greater level of hierarchy, crowned by state formation. However, recent research, particularly those 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 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 Skalnнk 1978b: 640) early state.

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# Preface

The story of this book is rather curious. It was written absolutely unintentionally. It grew out of a short paper prepared for, and presented at the panel "Alternativity in Cultural History: Heterarchy and Homoarchy as Evolutionary Trajectories" that I had proposed (together with Prof. Carole L. Crumley) for, and convened at the Third International Conference "Hierarchy and Power in the History of Civilizations" held in Moscow, Russia in June 2004 (see the Conference book of abstracts, reports and proceedings: Alexeev *et al.* 2004; Bondarenko and Kavykin 2004; 2005; Bondarenko and Nemirovskiy 2006). The paper was so short that when the idea to publish the panel's proceedings appeared, I had to write some more pages for transforming it into yet a rather short article. The article was submitted to the publisher along with other contributions (see Bondarenko 2006) but I was already thinking of writing a longer version for an academic journal. When the manuscript approached its fortieth "standard page", I finally understood that it had become too long for a typical journal article. However, by that moment I had already felt unable to make myself stop writing, just as now I could not understand how less than a year before I was cudgeling my brains over the odd and funny problem of how to make the text at least a dozen pages long. So, I wrote this book out of despair: no other format of academic publication is able to comprise so many words and pages. Nevertheless, the text has turned out rather short again, this time for a book. So, the manuscript has passed the way from a short paper to a short article to a short book. Yet my modest hope is that the well-wishing reader will find in this *opus* some merits other than that it will not take him or her too much time to read it. If this turns out the case, the author will be even happier because though the book was really written occasionally and unexpectedly for himself, it deals with the problematics which he, this or that way, had been approaching and studying for not a short time at all, to which he has eventually devoted almost twenty years of academic career, in other words – of life.

Besides my wife Natasha and daughter Tanechka to whom I cordially dedicate this book, I am indebted for constant support to my mother Lidia.

I also regard as my great honor and privilege this chance to express deep and sincere gratitude to many colleagues. I would like to say "thank you" once again to all the participants in that very panel on alternativity in cultural history and to Carole Crumley (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, USA) who was preparing it and was to convene together with me but, to my and all the panel participants' great pity, could not come to the Conference. I am grateful to David Small at Lehigh University (Bethlehem, USA) for supplying me with a photocopy of the inspiring and groundbreaking

USA), Sergey Polyakov (Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia), Vladimir Popov (Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, St. Petersburg, Russia), Declan Quigley (formerly University of St. Andrews, Fife, UK), Peter Roese (Lautertal, Germany), Nadejda Selounskaia (Institute of World History, Moscow, Russia), Lada Semenchenko (Institute of World History, Moscow, Russia), Petr Skalnнk (University of Pardubice, Czech Republic), and Paul Wason (Templeton Foundation, Philadelphia, USA).

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# I

# What Is Homoarchy?

### 1. The notion of homoarchy: introduction and explanation

The word "homoarchy" first came to the present author's and his colleague, Andrey Korotayev's, minds during an informal discussion of Carole Crumley's concept of "heterarchy" (1979; 1987; 1995; 2001; 2005). Crumley (1995: 3; see also 1979: 144; 1987: 158; 2001: 25; 2005: 39) 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 the social sciences (see Crumley 1987: 156–157; 2005: 36–40). 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 not more than 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 the social sciences homoarchy must not be identified with hierarchy (as well as heterarchy must not be confused with egalitarianism in the strict proper meaning of the word [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. Estellie 1985; Johnson, G. 1989; Bondarenko 1993b; 2004b; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000d; Ehrenreich et al. 1995: 1–5, 87–100, 116–120, 125–131; Blanton 1998; Crumley 2005). This dictum's verity is confirmed explicitly by the authors of not a few recent works on an impressive variety of specific cultures, based on different kinds of sources – archaeological (e.g., Small 1995; Wailes 1995; Kristiansen 1998: 54–56; Rautman 1998; Anderson, C. E. 1999; Kuijt 2000: 312–315; Stein 2001; Scarborough et al. 2003), written (e.g., Reynolds 1990; Korotayev 1998b; Zolotov 1999), and first-hand ethnographic (e.g., Kelly 1993; Jolly and Mosko 1994; Kammerer 1998; Nangoro 1998: 47–48). Even among so-called "egalitarian" hunter-gatherers (Woodburn 1982) with strong ethos of equality and lack of pronounced social stratification (like the Hadza, San, Pygmies, Birhor,

Paliayans, Udihe, Shoshone, etc.) one nevertheless can observe minimal social differentiation, and hence hierarchies and inequality, combined with informal leadership (see, *e.g.*, recent generalized descriptions and considerations: Johnson, A. W. and Earle 2000: 41–89; Artemova 2004: 190–196, and: Thomas, D. H. 1981; Josephides 1985; Flanagan and Rayner 1988; Flanagan 1989; Boehm 1999; Kaplan, D. 2000; Marlowe 2003). Schweitzer (2000: 129) legitimately insists on the necessity "to break up the general label 'egalitarian' into a continuum of actual constellations of inequality," adding that today "… even ardent supporters of 'primitive communism' agree that 'perfect equality' does not exist…" (see also, *inter alia*, Fried 1970/1960; Dahrendorf 1970/1968; Rousseau 1985; Trigger 1985: 49–51; Lee 1988; Gellner 1992; Winterhalder and Smith, E. A. 1992; Artemova 2000a; 2000b; 2003; Kradin 2004). On the opposite end of the complexity levels scale even such societies as "archaic states", usually thought of as socially immobile and heavily bureaucratized (Egypt, the Ur III state, the Inca kingdom, etc.), in reality "were both heterarchical *and* hierarchical [homoarchical]" (Marcus and Feinman 1998: 11; original emphasis).

Herbert Barry III even suggested a "formula" of "optimal" interrelation between the homoarchic and heterarchic features: "… a combination of homoarchical stability with heterarchical freedom of choice" (2005: 3) or, another way round, "… the individual freedom and adaptability of heterarchical choices combined with the predictability and continuity of homoarchical structures" (2004: 9). In particular, in the complex societies' political systems, as Barry argues (2004: 9; 2005: 16), the optimum may be achieved by means of combining homoarchical subordination of the local units to a higher government with the heterarchical selected leadership at the local or better both the local and national, levels. 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 1999/1985: 45–57) and early-medieval "Barbarian kingdoms" in which one can observe the 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; Claessen 1985; Sannikov 2003).

So, it does look like it is impossible to measure degrees of homoarchy and heterarchy in a society with mathematical exactness, for example, in per cent. A purely quantitative approach is also inapplicable here: the presence of, say five hierarchies in a society as an entity does not make it more heterarchic and less homoarchic in comparison with a society with four hierarchies if in the former there is and in the latter there is no one dominant hierarchy. The pathway to evaluation of a society as heterarchic or homoarchic (in either absolute or relative categories) goes through an analysis of it as a whole – as a

dynamic system of social hierarchies, and the aim of this analysis in the vein of systems theory (see, *e.g.*, Hill 1977; Laszlo 1996: 95–126) should be not to count the hierarchies but to understand the way they are related to each other.

Hence, the question which rises at studying a particular society is as follows: are the hierarchies that form the given social system ranked (more or less) rigidly or not?  Do, say, two individuals find themselves ranked toward each other the same way in any social context or not?  For instance, in the exemplary heterarchic society of the Pathans of the Swat valley as it was described by Fredrik Barth (1959), a man could occupy not identical positions in the hierarchies of three intersecting main frameworks of social organization: territorial divisions, casts, and patrilineal descent groups, supplemented by a significant number of free-choice associations based on neighborhood, marriage and affinity, political and economic clientship, etc.  So, a Swat Pathan *X* could be superior to his compatriot *Y* in one social context and inferior or equal in another.  On the other hand, before the abolishing of serfdom in 1861 a Russian serf by no means could be regarded as equal (and furthermore superior) to a nobleman, as a soldier cannot but be inferior to an officer[1].  In the meantime, at the level of the theory we cannot but agree with Gary Feinman (1996: 189) that though "anthropologists have long discussed a range of social mechanisms that integrate people both through horizontal (more egalitarian) and vertical (more hierarchical) links", only "ongoing comparative investigations should help place these diverse social arrangements in a broader diachronic context".

Probably, one day it will become possible to make a scale of socio-political forms in accordance with the degree and way homoarchy and heterarchy are interrelated within their general frameworks.  I am sure this is a task worth fulfilling but also have to confess that at the moment I do not feel able to propose a proper criterion or a combination of criteria for such a scaling, though there is no doubt that they should be qualitative rather than formal – quantitative.

## 2. Principles of organization and systems of values

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 1980/1966; 1986/1983), 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, as well as in the wider Hindu world, is criticized nowadays (Mosko 1994b: 24–50; Quigley 1999; 2002), 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 attributed to that of purity in the case of India. Examples from so-called "traditional" societies may be provided as well: for instance, Benjamin Ray (1991: 206) argues that in clearly homoarchic precolonial Buganda (see, *e.g.*, Godiner 1982; Wrigley 1996) the encompassing "… majesty of the Kabakaship (the institution of the supreme ruler – the "king." – *D. B.*) was made, not born. The Kabakaship… was a cultural creation, not just a political product…" As another Africanist, Jan Vansina (1992: 21, 24), generalizes, "Tropical African kingdoms… were products of an ideology more than of any other force… Tropical African kingdoms were truly built in the mind first, and were grounded in faith" (for an analysis from the same standpoint of the Ekie kingdom in the southern Democratic Republic of Congo see: Kopytoff 1987: 91–99). Even in simple cultures socio-political homoarchization could become the case by means of coming into the fore of ideologies based on the encompassing idea of all the society members' fundamental division into those having and not having access to esoteric knowledge and the right to perform activities related to it (Artemova 1991; 1992; 1993; 2000a; 2000b; 2003; 2004; Artemova and Korotayev 2003;[2] see also Bern 1979).

However, the encompassment is not always immediately rooted in the realm of ideas as such; it may well arise from a religiously-ideologically biased conceptualization of preexisting social and political realities, as it happened with the idea of the "conical clan" – the ramage (that distance from the senior line of descent from the common ancestor is *the* criterion of stratification) in Polynesia (*e.g.*, Sahlins 1958: XI–XII, 139–180; Firth 1963; Goldman 1970; Claessen 1996b; 2005b; Kirch 1997; Kirch and Green 2001). It may also be noteworthy at this point that among theorists of the chiefdom – the most prominent and, in many concepts, the only possible type of the middle-range homoarchic society, the problem of initially (and even essentially) ideological or socio-political priority in encompassing all the respective cultures' hierarchies is still very far from solution and remains a battlefield for anthropologists and archaeologists from different theoretical camps (*vide stricto* Earle 1997; Kelekna 1998; Beliaev *et al.* 2001; Carneiro 2002).

In any case, contrary to "holistic" (homoarchic) cultures, 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. In a (generally) heterarchic society one can expect to find positive evaluation of individualism in intellectual as well as social life ("ego-focused social systems" [White 1995]) related to the emphasis on personal honor and dignity, importance of public opinion, high degree of social mobility and at least numerical prevalence of achieved statuses over ascribed

ones. Remarkably, according to Whiting and Childe (1953) the dependence training is associated precisely with extended families, whereas the respective socialization pattern tends to ensure the compliance in the performance of assigned tasks and dependence on the family, rather than reliance on oneself, which would tend to produce a personality type compatible with homoarchic rather than heterarchic sociopolitical systems (see also Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000b). This is typical of not only such paradigmatic examples of heterarchic cultures as the ancient *polis* and *civitas*, some late-ancient and early-medieval European societies, or Western countries from the time of Renaissance on, but also of many other cultures, probably less prominent though not less significant for anthropological theorizing: egalitarian hunter-gatherers (*e.g.*, Gardner 2000), "acephalous complex societies" of mountainous areas like the Himalayas (*e.g.*, Leach 1954; Fьrer-Haimendorf 1962; Berezkin 1995a; 1995b; Shinkaryov 1997), the Caucasus (*e.g.*, Khashaev 1961; Ikhilov 1967; Magometov 1978; Aglarov 1988), etc., the most complex of which resemble the socio-political model of the Greek *polis* (Aglarov 1988; Korotayev 1995c; Kisriev 2004: 23), tribal societies of the Americas (*e.g.*, Lowie 1935; Oberg 1953; Hoebel 1960; Hickerson 1962; Harner 1972), Eurasia (*e.g.*, Barth 1959; Irons 1975; Tapper 1983; Korotayev 1998b), and Africa (*e.g.*, Evans-Pritchard 1940; Tait 1961; Hart 2000; Bonte 2004), or the socio-political organization of Iceland in the "Age of Democracy" (930 – 1267) (*e.g.*, Tomasson 1980; Hastrup 1985; Byock 1988) unclassifiable in categories commonly accepted in anthropology, to mention just a few.

Bruce Trigger (2003: 196–197, 661, 665–666) postulates that heterarchical relations played greater role in small city-states than in larger city-states and territorial states. Even if Trigger is correct with respect to what he defines as "early civilizations", the regularity "the smaller territory, the more heterarchy" is clearly inapplicable to non-state and modern industrial societies. For example, a typical tribe, generally heterarchic (*vide stricto* Service 1971/1962: 103, 142, 145–146; 1975: 63–70; 1978b: 4–6; Fried 1975; Haas and Creamer 1993: 1–9; Rogers 1995; Southall 1996; Bonte 2000), covers relatively vast territory while a typical chiefdom is both generally homoarchic (*vide stricto* Service 1971/1962: 133–169; 1975: 15–16; 1978b: 6–8; Feinman 1996; Muller, J.-C. 2000; Beliaev *et al.* 2001) and territorially more compact than the tribe. As for modern societies, the elaboration of principles of federalism and representative governmental bodies (local and national), joint with the development of means of communication eliminated the territory size as a significant predictor of societal type. However, in light of the tendency noticed by Trigger, we may regard early civilizations as cultures in which a very important general feature leading to heterarchy or homoarchy found the most vivid and materially visible expression. This feature is that normally more heterarchy can be observed in the societies in which interpersonal face-to-

face relations are of primary (or at least great) importance compared to depersonalized and formalized ones.

### 3. Principles of organization and structures of society

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 2004; Cook 2004; Reicher 2004). Besides, also very importantly, I believe it is legitimate and even necessary to apply both notions – of heterarchy and homoarchy – within a broad framework of social relations and societal structure in general, not to power relations only. If we attempt at characterizing a society (or "culture" in the American cultural anthropologists' thesaurus) as a whole, we must recognize what structuralists call "political system" as only one of its integral parts, in preindustrial cultures inseparably interpenetrable with all others (*e.g.*, Skalnнk 1991), and hence should label the society according to its more general feature – the societal type, and this should be so not with respect to the state only but with respect to any society (see Bondarenko 1989; 1991d; 1993b; 1996a; 2001: 244–250; see also below – chapter 4, section 2; and Jakobson 1997b).

More so, in this I see a possible key to understanding of (at least immediate) condition for this or that complex society's homoarchic or heterarchic nature. As sociologists point out, "[e]ach subsystem of a society is characterized by its own form of stratification: earnings and wealth in the economic sphere; privilege and power in the political system; moral worth and personal trust in religious and family life; and prestige and esteem in the occupational world" (Laumann *et al.* 1970:589). Hence, the more the subsystems are interpenetrable, the less the criteria for general social ranking are diversified and applied to particular spheres of social life only. In other words, the more the subsystems are interpenetrable, the more probability that in any social context those being within it will be ranked the same way as in another one on the assumption of the value equally encompassing all the intertwined spheres of society. In this case the establishment of the homoarchic social order can be detected and fixed. It then looks logical that there were more homoarchic than heterarchic archaic (in the Jaspersian sense [Jaspers 1953/1949]) complex societies: just there under the conditions of "mechanic solidarity" (Durkheim 1991/1893) a sufficiently clear separation between social spheres is observed less commonly.

The excessive emphasis on the administrative system actually leads some scholars to, for example, confusing the absence of the "king" with the absence of any "hierarchical features" (McIntosh 1999b: 77) or heterarchy with lack of autocracy due to division of power between the sovereign and collective bodies like councils or secret societies (McIntosh 1999c: 9–16, 23) while, first, true autocracy in this sense is an exceptionally rear case in world history – even most authoritative leaders usually prefer to have some collective bodies, at least

as a cloak for their actions (the Roman Senate in the time of Princepses and so forth), second, the true degree of a political system's democracy does not depend on the formal political system too heavily (compare, *e.g.*, the USA and the USSR with *de jure* democratic systems of political institutions in both cases), and third, in many cases the real democracy or non-democracy of a political system may be a dependent variable with respect to democracy or non-democracy of the basic social institutions; in preindustrial societies and many contemporary non-Western countries – the family and community[3] first and foremost (Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000c; 2001; 2004; Korotayev and Bondarenko 2000a; Bondarenko 2004b; Barry 2003; 2004).

Crumley herself clearly destines the notion of heterarchy exclusively to the study of the political sphere insisting just on "the addition of the term heterarchy to the vocabulary of *power* relations…" (1995: 3; emphasis added; see also, *e.g.*, 2005: 36, 40–41) 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.[4] 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 tends to look at the state, more or less exclusively, as at a specific form of political organization. Such a glance at the state leads Crumley and her followers to unreasonable identification of heterarchy with the democratic political regime (Crumley 1995: 3; 2005: 46–47; Vliet 2003) what, in my opinion, lowers the euristic potential of her concept (see below). In his review of one of Crumley's recent articles on heterarchy Robert Carneiro (2004: 163) asks: "But by introducing this term into the study of political evolution does Crumley really enhance our understanding of the process?" The answer the patriarch of cultural evolutionist studies gives himself is strongly in the negative. However, notwithstanding my own dissatisfaction with some aspects of Crumley's approach, I would still dare disagree with Carneiro and say that in my opinion, the concept of heterarchy is a significant contribution to anthropological and archaeological theory (to what its growing popularity may testify [among others, see, *e.g.*, Ehrenreich *et al.* 1995; Stein 1998; Haggis *et al.* 2003; Scarborough *et al.* 2003; Alexeev *et al.* 2004: 5–17]) even in its present, generally less process- than typology-shaped, form. In the meantime I hope that its broadening, first, by supplementing with the concept of homoarchy, and second, by extending its inclusion up to the whole scope and variety of relations in society, could make the heterarchy concept's validity even higher.

## 4. Some possible implications and prospects

The fair dissatisfaction with the "classical" unilineal typological schemes like "from band to state" (Service 1971/1962) or "from egalitarian organization to

state society" (Fried 1967) growing especially rapidly from the second half of the 1980s (*vide stricto* Hallpike 1986; Mann 1986; Maisels 1987; 1993; Upham 1990; Yoffee 1993; Ehrenreich *et al.* 1995; Price and Feinman 1995; Arnold 1996; McIntosh 1999a; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000a; Claessen 2000c; Kradin *et al.* 2000; Guidi 2002; Trigger 2003; Grinin *et al.* 2004), has resulted not only in a new turn of rejection of the idea of evolution altogether (see Trigger 2003: 40–42) but also, within evolutionism, in thus much more 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 metaphysical evolutionary types-stages to dynamic transformation processes. The respective (yet not the only) reason for general discontent with the recently dominant theoretical paradigm was comprehensively resumed by Wenke (1999: 344): "The important point here is that simple categories such as 'bands', 'tribes', 'chiefdoms', and 'states' are static descriptive types that are not of much use in analyzing the origins and functions of the phenomena these labels loosely describe". For the sake of verity, it should be noted that this accusation is not so just with respect to classics of neoevolutionist political anthropology – Service, Fried, and Carneiro with their famous integrative (Service 1971/1962; 1975; Cohen and Service 1978), conflict (Fried 1970/1960; 1967), and circumscription (Carneiro 1970) theories of at least chiefdom and state *origins*, and with regards to some of the younger-generation scholars (*e.g.*, Earle [1997]), as with respect to countless authors for whom simple labeling their statically approached research objects as "chiefdoms", "states", or otherwise did become the initial reason and ultimate end for writing. In any case, I do believe that Carneiro (2000b; 2003: 155–156) is essentially right when he argues that the dichotomy "process *versus* stages" is "false": both are important[5]. The key-point here 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 up to the next stair of the notorious types ladder.

In particular, the groundbreaking in my opinion the "dual-processual theory" elaborated in the last decade by Mesoamericanists (*e.g.*, Blanton 1994; Feinman 1995; 2001; Blanton *et al.* 1996), is aimed at the same as the heterarchy – homoarchy idea: "… 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 on all the levels of social complexity, so contrary to the Service's, Fried's and the like unilineal schemes, the degree of political centralization as an aspect of the overall socio-cultural hierarchization is an improper criterion for defining an overall developmental level (see Bondarenko 1997c: 10–15; 1998b; 1998d; 2000c; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000d; Bondarenko *et al.* 2002; Korotayev *et al.* 2000; Korotayev

2003a: 45–91).[6] Furthermore, in the course of history a society can not just change its internal organization from homoarchic to heterarchic or *vice versa* (Crumley 1987: 164–165; 1995: 4; Berezkin 2000; Beliaev *et al.* 2001: 380–381; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000d; Bondarenko 2001: 255–256; 2004b: 47; Bondarenko *et al.* 2002: 57; 2003: 6–7), but not infrequently does it without a change of the overall level of complexity, *e.g.*, at the transition from chiefdom to tribe (Korotayev 1995a; 1996; 1998b); for some of many other examples of that sort of transition taken from different parts of the world (Southeast, South, and East Asia, Western, Southern, and Northern Europe, Central and North America, etc.) and historical periods from antiquity to modernity, see Leach 1954; Shkunaev 1988; Miscatti *et al.* 1991; Levy 1995; Lynsha 1998; Beliaev 2000b; Chamblee 2000: 15–35; Kowalewski 2000; Kradin 2000c; Dozhdev 2004/2000; for a general philosophic grounding of regularity of cardinal social transformations not accompanied by a change of the overall cultural complexity level, see Shemjakin 1992: 18–19.[7]

The division into homoarchic and heterarchic associations is observable among the non-human primates too (Vehrencamp 1983; Butovskaya and Fajnberg 1993; Butovskaya 1994; 2000; Butovskaya *et al.* 2000; Deryagina and Butovskaya 2004; Matsumura 1999), so it may well be rooted in deep prehistory of the humankind. Among the simplest cultures known to anthropology – those of non-specialized hunter-gatherers, the homoarchy – heterarchy division is reflected in the notions of "non-egalitarian" (the Australian aborigines is the most vivid example, probably as the one best studied but hardly unique [compare, *e.g.*, with the Tasmanians[8] – Kabo 1975; 1986: 21–34, the Ona of Terra del Fuego – Cooper 1946, the Athapaskans and Eyak of North Pacific Rim – Schweitzer 2000, or the Lower Amur Nanais – Bulgakova 2002]) and "egalitarian" (the Hadza, San, Pygmies, Shoshone, Paliyans, Yukaghir, etc.) societies respectively (*e.g.*, Woodburn 1982; Artemova 1991). Significantly, the archaeological and historical-anthropological evidence confirms the deep antiquity of non-egalitarian simple human cultures: for example, the Tasmanians were "maybe the only society that had remained by the beginning of European colonization at the stage of development corresponding to Advanced Paleolithic" (Kabo 1986: 21), and the prehistoric Australian culture shares basic features with the culture of the Aborigines known to anthropologists (Clark, G. and Piggott 1970: 98–102), so it can be supposed reasonably that non-egalitarianism has been typical of them since the deep archaeological past. At the level of simple agricultural village communities, one of the guiding examples is provided by Burton Pasternak's (1972) study of two Chinese villages on Taiwan which shared common origin but in one of which (Chungshe) there eventually formed the homoarchic system of corporate patrilineages with one lineage permanently dominating politically, while in the other village (Tatieh) the development of lineages was early compromised by corporate cross-kin associations what resulted in the

heterarchic system of non-localized agnatic descent groups each of which could produce the village head.

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*, and though it is problematic to dichotomize the strategies to the degree the model creators propose (as, for example, the African evidence reveals [McIntosh 1999c: 17–19]; see also criticism on the model in this respect at the very moment of its presentation by several comment-makers [Cowgill 1996: 53; Demarest 1996: 56; Kolb 1996: 59][9]), I believe that the two approaches may be productively 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 original) which from the 1980s has been more and more opposed to the strategies approach, with favoring the latter (Montmollin 1989: 2). However, to my mind, in this case "to move beyond" must mean "to incorporate", not "to reject" – I fully 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 a link between the two approaches, being beyond the purposes of the present, generally typological, work,[10] is a task for the future. However, this future does not seem to be very distant but on the contrary, looks quite observable: recently Richard Pearson (2001) has already made an attempt to employ both of the approaches – the heterarchy (but of course not heterarchy–homoarchy) and network–corporate strategies ones for a case study – that of state formation on the Okinawa islands; Edward van der Vliet (2005: 142) has pointed out, though contrary to Pearson, without elaboration, that "… the political system of the [Greek] *polis* can be characterized as heterarchical…" while "[t]he formation of the *polis*… [is] the result of corporate strategies, and not of the network strategies…" The compatibility of the heterarchy and dual-processual theories has also been recognized in general by some students of another area far from those basing on the evidence from which these theories were created (late-ancient and early-medieval Celts in the first case and pre-Columbian Mesoamerica in the second) – precolonial Africa south of the Sahara; for the first time, as to my knowledge, by Susan McIntosh (1999c: 14–19), although with some important and just reservations, on the one hand, and without deep elaboration on the point in general, on the other hand. So, I believe, my optimism is substantiated, at least to some extent.

While a link between the heterarchy–homoarchy concept and the dual-processual theory may be usefully established within the social sciences, a link between the former and the quite recently appeared complexity studies can be

set up only in a broader interdisciplinary vein and not without serious methodological difficulties.[11]    However, as Crumley (2005) has recently demonstrated, the two visions yet may well be complementary and hence theoretically informative for researchers from both spheres.

The difficulties primarily rise from the fact that the very notion of complexity is understood differently in the social sciences (anthropology and archaeology) on the one hand, and complexity studies on the other hand.  In the social sciences complexity is routinely understood as structural: the more "levels of socio-political integration" the more complex a culture is, disregarding the way the levels (structural components of the whole) are interrelated, and this approach differs from the one employed in the complexity studies – as sustained non-equilibrium.  So, in the sense accepted in the social sciences it is wrong to postulate that either heterarchy or homoarchy as a principle of culture's organization presupposes a higher level of complexity while within the complexity studies theoretical framework the conclusion must be different.  Summarizing her previous research into the comparison of heterarchies and what she calls "hierarchies" (loosely corresponding to homoarchies) from the standpoint of their "advantages" and "disadvantages", Crumley (*Ibid.*: 43–44; see also 2001) argues, *e.g.*, that under hierarchy there are "clear decision making chain", "political interactions few and formalized", "political maintenance of the system is low" while under heterarchy the opposite situation is observed.  This means that in terms of the complexity studies the heterarchic socio-political model is more complex than homoarchic: it is not less sustained but has a higher degree of non-equilibrium.  In fact, symptomatically, the social scientists (archaeologists) Timothy Pauketat and Thomas Emerson (2006) postulate that heterarchic societies are more complex than "hierarchic" (again, more or less equal to those called "homoarchic" in the present work) as far as "hierarchization" leads to simplification of many complexities of social life.

Throughout this work the author, an anthropologist, departs from the definition of (cultural) complexity traditional for the social sciences.  In the meantime, he admits, and even believes, that in some time social scientists will be able to make more use of the complexity studies theories and modify their approach to cultural complexity.  From my viewpoint, in this case too, the rejection of the older (for the social sciences) formulation of complexity shall not be the question.  I suppose that borrowing of the formulation elaborated by the social complexity students can help diversifying the anthropological-archaeological one by promoting the creation of a sort of an internal complexity scale within the wider scale of overall structural complexity levels.  After creating it, social scientists will maybe have reasons to argue that, for example, heterarchic middle-range societies are more complex than homoarchic middle-range societies, yet being at the same level of overall structural complexity.  However, the problem of, at least as it seems to me now, incomplete

compatibility of the social sciences (not inevitable but at the present state of the art) and complexity studies persists: for the former the global (comparative) aspect of the overall complexity level traditionally dominates the research, while for the complexity studies it turns out generally insignificant, the students' attention concentrated on the internal organization as its components' sustained non-equilibrium and the way it is provided.

Indeed, the present chapter is generally typological and its main task is just introductory. It is about the very fact of the phenomenon of homoarchy's existence that demands a proper term for its designation rather than about the preconditions of, and pathways to and of homoarchy (or heterarchy), although the reader can find some ideas on the point in the chapter's different sections as well as in the subsequent chapters. The concept of homoarchy might be useful (and the respective term might be theoretically informative) for better understanding of the temporally and spatially universal basic principles of social organization that underlie the myriad of its specific forms throughout history, and I believe that the first step was to be just the one made in this chapter, notwithstanding the actual impossibility to make the examples given in it not only much more abundant but also less cryptic and linked to the theoretical points in a more forceful manner. In case the very phenomenon is recognized and the term accepted by the interested part of the anthropological academic community, the problems of conditions for homoarchy's appearance and historical transformations, of its measuring and scaling, of interrelations between the homoarchic and heterarchic principles of social organization and the network and corporate strategies, as well as many, many others, will definitely become worth putting on agenda. The necessity of detailed case studies produced in respective theoretical light will also come to the fore, and the present book can be regarded as the first step in this direction (see also Bondarenko 2005a; 2006). The Benin evidence will definitely shed light on the problems of preconditions for, and terms of the homoarchic societies' nature, appearance, and dynamics, too.

# II

# What Is Called the State?

**1. Conceptualizing the state: inevitable Eurocentrism?**

Hundreds of definitions of the state have been proposed by now. It turns out actually impossible to combine all (or even almost all) of them into one "generalized" definition (see Vliet 2005: 121–122) but it still may be argued quite safely that within the framework of the overwhelming majority of modern theories of the state this phenomenon is considered 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[12] (see, *e.g.*, "summarizing" definitions in anthropological encyclopedias, text-books, and general publications of the recent years: Earle 1994: 945; Claessen 1996c; Marcus and Feinman 1998: 4; Elwert 1999: 352; Ember and Ember 1999: 226–229, 242; Абйлис 2000; Kradin 2004: 268). This approach to the state, rooted in the European political, philosophic, legal, and anthropological thought from Antiquity on (Hodgen 1964: 354–515; Harris 1968; Service 1975: 21–46; 1978a; Nersesjants 1985; 1986; Iljushechkin 1996: 13–92; Абйлис 2000: 239; Gomerov 2002: 14–68; Evans-Pritchard 2003/1981: 15–79), in the 20th century became equally typical of Marxists, (neo)evolutionists, and structuralists notwithstanding significant differences between them (see below).

The whole paradigm is sometimes heavily criticized and even rejected (especially often by the Third World, including African, scholars [*e.g.*, Diop, C. A. 1960; Diagne 1970] but not only – see, *e.g.*, Skalnнk 1983; 1987; Southall 1991: 76; Gledhill 1994: 9–17; Oosten and Velde 1994a: 15–16; 1994b: 299–300; Lielukhine 2002) on the grounds that claiming for universality, it historically reflects exclusively the Western approach to the phenomenon and even that it is based on Europe's historical experience only (in the most radical version – exceptionally of modern, bourgeois Western Europe [Entrиves 1969; Vincent, A. 1987; Belkov 1993; 1995; Creveld 1999]). In our opinion, the Eurocentrism of the theory of the state results from a much more inclusive fact – the fact that mature modern science as such was born in postmedieval Europe as an outcome of its development in the preceding periods – the Antiquity and Middle Ages. The very contemporary scientific way of thinking (including anthropological thought [see Hodgen 1964; Hartog *et al.* 2000]) is deeply rooted in the European tradition. The European intellectual legacy is

more evident in the social sciences but if there could have been culturally biased variations in natural sciences, definitely there would have been discussions about Eurocentrism in physics or chemistry. Indeed, the modern science is originally, basically a European phenomenon (Jaspers 1953/1949). In this respect all modern sciences have initially been and will always remain Eurocentric to this or that degree, and social scientists ought to be especially sensitive to this fact. For the first time in Anthropology it was conceptualized in generally reasonable terms by Franz Boas (1940) as the antithesis to unilinear evolutionism, then emphasized more rigorously by his numerous students, especially Melville Herskovits (1955), but unfortunately carried to an absurdity by postmodernists (*e.g.*, Geertz 1973; 1983) with their actual rejection of possibility of any objective knowledge about cultures and their valid comparisons (for severe, but to my mind deserved, criticism on this approach *vide stricto* Carneiro 1995). What has led postmodernism to this methodological and theoretical default, is precisely its adepts and adherents' excessive radicalism in formulating of, and struggle for one of their main goals, which is legal, correct, and even may be achieved with valid outcomes for the science, but only being set in a more moderate and limited way: "… to avoid grounding itself in the theoretical and commonsense categories of… Western tradition" (Tyler 1986: 129). However, in light of the aforesaid, this has to remain a task which one can fulfil better or worse but never completely if he or she wishes to remain in the realm of anthropological science; as Tim Ingold (1996: 5; see also *Ibid.*: 1–2) wrote with regards precisely to this very point, "Short of becoming poets, painters or novelists, there seems to be no way out."

Indeed, the general characteristic features most often attributed to the state *per se* one does can recognize without difficulties in many non-European societies, particularly Asian from ancient times on. Not so rarely the Asian societies' stately features tend to be even overemphasized and demonized what is most vividly expressed in the idea of "Oriental despotism" enshrined in a long list of concepts and theories opened in the time of Enlightenment, crowned by the famous Wittfogel's book (1957), and still replenishing (for probably the most recent addition see Nepomnin 2004). At this point, our ideas of "civilizational models of politogenesis" (Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000a), "types of civilizational development" (Bondarenko 1992a; 1995d; 1997c; 1998d; 2000c), and even more so – the concept of "evolutionary streams" of Henri Claessen (2000b: 6–8; 2000c: 66, 171–174, 186–189, 194–195; see also Hallpike 1986) can be highly relevant: due to scantiness of the number of effective responses to similar problems of security, production, etc. arising in different evolutionary streams, basically similar (though not identical in every detail but civilizationally, *i.e.*, regionally flavored and colored) institutions, including those characterizing the state, may well appear in many historically unrelated cases (see also Kradin and Lynsha 1995; Haas 2001). In the meantime, it may also happen with high probability that two even neighboring

(and furthermore distant) cultures' responses to the same essential problems turn out so different that the cultures eventually take essentially different evolutionary paths.

On the other hand, hardly it is correct to talk about a certain homogeneous "European historical experience" in the socio-political sphere. To realize it, it is enough to compare the semantics of the words denoting political organization in different European languages. For example, *state* in English or *Ĭtat* in French means not only the political system but also "condition." So, in such a context the state is a specific condition of society into which political power is inserted; the former is primary towards the latter. On the contrary, in Russian the respective word – *gosudarstvo* is derived from *gosudar'* – "sovereign", so power, not society is seen as the basic, dominant category: the state is not a society to which power serves but is a property of the sovereign to whom the society due services. In any case, the state of the art in state studies by now is such that we may ascertain safely that the two characteristics – political centralization (either in the sense of "the 'concentration' of power in the hands of a few" [Roscoe 1993: 113; see also, *e.g.*, Morris 1998: 293], or "the degree of linkage between the various subsystems and the highest-order controls in society" [Flannery 1972: 409; see also, *e.g.*, Cohen 1978b: 45–46], or both) and specialization of administration, still form the backbone of the theory of the state in general. It is also recognized, hardly not as a common place, that "… the expansion of the administration, and more especially the trend towards bureaucratization in the early state were closely connected with centralization" (Skalnнk 1978: 600). If these characteristics are adequate and sufficient, is another point to which I will return and on which will elaborate below.

## 2. The state: "to be or not to be?"

Allotting the state common universal characteristics does not *a priori* mean that any sufficiently complex society is "obliged" to acquire them. This idea could have seemed very simple if it had not taken it so long to penetrate into anthropological theory, or better to say, into some of contemporary anthropological theories. The initial step was made with the first attempts to escape from unilinear evolutionism[13] that declared state formation as a teleological goal of the socio-political process marked by perpetual progressive move to greater overall socio-cultural complexity, most significantly expressed by, and concentrated in the growth of political centralization and social stratification. Within evolutionism these attempts were made only in the mid-20th century. During the preceding period in Western Europe and North America evolutionism turned out so unattractive, mainly just due to its unilinearity, that even those classics of that time who by no means rejected the very idea of evolution (*e.g.*, Boas [1940: 270–280], Lowie [1948: 32–53], Radcliffe-Brown [*e.g.*, 1947; see also Carneiro 2003: 82–85]) were not

evolutionists themselves but preferred to study "structures" and "institutions" more or less statically on the grounds that, to their minds, any reconstruction of deep historical (evolutionary) sequences in non-literate cultures could not but be as speculative as it was in the writings of Tylor, Morgan, Spencer and other unilinear evolutionists (as far as, actually, there had been no evolutionists of any other sort by that time).

The very fact of evolutionism's return to the big stage of anthropological theory due to Leslie White did not set the problem of the state's inevitability going as White's way of thinking was not less unilinear and (probably because of the necessity to carry on severe struggle against "anti-evolutionists") even more rigid than that of the evolutionists of the 19th – early 20th centuries. In the Soviet Union evolutionism (in the form of dogmatic Marxism, in anthropology based on canonization of the ideas of Morgan in their Marx and Engels's interpretation) had been the only officially allowed teaching since the early 1930s. Curiously (and at the same time so tragically for many scholars soon subjected to repressions!), the ideas that contained a grain of non-unilinearity – those of the Asiatic mode of production (Marx) and of two distinctive pathways to the state: the Western, through privatization of the means of production, and the Eastern, through usurpation of political functions (Engels), were declared… non-Marxist, contradicting "true Marxism" (see, *e.g.*, Lynsha 1995; Kradin 2004: 43–46).

The impetus for a breakthrough was given by seminal works by Julian Steward (*vide stricto* 1955/1949). As it is well known, he did not argue that the state could be not the only possible crown of socio-political evolution. However, he substantiated the idea of evolutionary pathways' multiplicity – the very thought that cultures can evolve differently, at least on the way to state. This thought was not at all accepted for granted. For such younger classics of American neoevolutionism as, for example, Morton Fried (1967; 1970/1960), Elman Service (1971/1962; 1975), Robert Carneiro (1970; 2003: 110–115), or even Marshall Sahlins (1960)[14] the unilinear approach in general and to the universality of the state in particular has remained much closer. Also at least till publication of *Ideology and the Formation of Early States* (Claessen and Oosten 1996a), unilinearity was characteristic of the Early State concept (Carneiro 1987: 757; Skalnнk 1996: 84–85; Bondarenko 1998c: 18–22; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000d: 12–13; Kradin 1998: 10–12), one of the most deeply and thoroughly elaborated Europe-born theories of preindustrial societies' socio-political evolution.

The evident fact that a great many of societies have never transformed into states they still tended to see as the result of their devolution or, more often, of sticking on a lower, preliminary stair of the only evolutionary staircase leading up to the state (for example, due to "the law of evolutionary potential" [Service 1960]). Nonetheless, by now world anthropology has produced a significant number of penetrating publications on the multiplicity of pathways

to essentially common socio-political organization forms; not only to state (see, *e.g.*, Kubbel 1988; Kradin and Lynsha 1995; Claessen and Oosten 1996b; Claessen 2000c; Trigger 1993; 2003) but also to chiefdom (*vide stricto* Earle 1997). This understanding of evolution – as a diversity of pathways to common goal is generally dominant up to now, or at least was dominant until very recently.

However, possibly unexpectedly enough, the unilinear concept of many societies' sticking on stairs preceding that of statehood has been turned a specifically multilinear way round. The idea that these societies were not situated on one staircase with the state on its upper stair but from the very start moved along basically different evolutionary pathways has become popular (see the review: Guidi 2002). If such a vision is employed, no one of, for example, the band, tribe, chiefdom, and state is inferior or superior to another: they are just initially and essentially different (Yoffee 1993). This standpoint seems to me useful as an important step toward non-linear evolutionism but too radical as such, especially with respect to the problem of alternatives to the state. This view does presuppose non-inevitability of the state but treats the issue of alternatives to it in an excessively wide way. If we employ the idea (reasonable, as to my mind) that socio-political complexity can be measured not only formally-structurally (by the number of political jurisdiction levels above the local community) but also by complexity of problems a given culture turns out able or unable to solve effectively (*e.g.*, Claessen 1984), we will see that, for instance, foragers' bands are generally incomparable to preindustrial states and other agricultural, especially complex, societies (recollect, for example, the history of the Pygmies' and San's displacing to unfavorable ecological milieu by the Bantu [see, *e.g.*, Clark, J. D. 1977/1970: 202–205; Sutton 1982/1971: 111–114; Lvova 1984: 40–42; Noten 1988/1982: 95–98]).

Indeed, it sounds very plausible that contemporary simple foragers represent a specific branch of human social evolution, and that from the historical perspective standpoint, the transition to social complexity is a chance, not a necessity (Tainter 1990: 38; Lozny 2000; Artemova 2004). Actually, this conclusion was anticipated, though not arrived at due to unilinear conceptual backgrond, in *Stone Age Economics* – the book in which Marshall Sahlins (1972) demonstrated convincingly that under favorable ecological conditions foragers could well get the surplus product sufficient enough for launching the processes of deep social differentiation, rigid political centralization and all the rest what in long-run could eventually result in state formation but this economic possibility was suppressed effectively by cultural mechanisms (see also Hawkes *et al.* 1985; Gowdy 1998). However, alternatives to the state as not an "evolutionary trajectory" but a form of socio-political organization may be sought only among complex societies. Under some specific circumstances, for example, ecological, an alternative to early state, though a limited in its potential, could be represented by constellations of chiefdoms or tribal

confederations (Korotayev 1995a; 1996; 1998b; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000a: 157–227; Kradin *et al.* 2000: 213–224, 242–257; Grinin 2004b). However, such structures could fulfill the typically state functions at a respectively high level only partially or occasionally (Grinin 1997; 2000a; 2004b; Claessen 2002). Only supercomplex societies could become stable and effective in long-run alternatives to the state, only they can be (and I am sure should be) considered as realizations of "historical projects", alternative to the statehood ones in the true sense of the word. In my belief, Benin Kingdom of the 13th – 19th centuries discussed at some length in the subsequent chapters was just "a proper candidate" for this role, as well as the other presumably non-state supercomplex societies mentioned in the last chapter.

## 3. Centralization and bureaucratization: the criteria's relevance for the state theory

Notwithstanding the historiographic tradition described sketchily in this chapter's opening sections, and particularly contrary to the postulate of political anthropology's Founding Fathers, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1987/1940b: 5), political centralization cannot be regarded as a specifically state's feature as it is applicable more or less to all the forms of complex homoarchic (organized basically "vertically") societies including chiefdoms first and foremost (Bondarenko 1997c: 10–15; 2000c; Bondarenko *et al.* 2002; Korotayev *et al.* 2000; Korotayev 2003a: 45–91; Testart 2004: 10). For example, see the following definitions (my emphases): "Chiefdoms are redistributional societies with a permanent *central* agency of coordination" (Service 1971/1962: 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, A. W. and Earle 2000: 301–303). As Timothy Earle resumes in his prominent review article (1987: 289), "… centrality is the clearest indicator of chiefdoms" (see also in other review articles: Kradin 1995: 11, 16–17; Beliaev *et al.* 2001, the latter being a general discussion of chiefdoms as centralized polities). Furthermore, even in simple societies power may be centralized by a "big man", "great man" (Sahlins 1963; Godelier 1982; Godelier and Strathern 1991), or "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.

On the other hand, significantly, 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; see also McIntosh 1999c: 17). 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)[15], 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 confused 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)?![16] 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, although its incipient forms can be observed in some of the most complex homoarchic prestate societies, such as Shang China (Vassiliev 1983) or the Hausa polities of the 15th – 18th centuries (Kiseljov 1981). Not occasionally in 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 (*vide stricto* Fried 1967; Wright 1977: 381–385; Earle 1978: 1–7; Claessen 1987; Godiner 1991; Kochakova 1991b; 1995: 158; Belkov 1995: 171–175; Kradin 1995: 44; Marcus and Feinman 1998: 4; Spencer 1998; Blanton *et al.* 1999: 112; Johnson, A. W. and Earle 2000: 245–329; Bondarenko 2001: 244–245), especially as far as impossibility to draw a clear line between the chiefdom and the early state in the spheres of economy and ideology is now generally recognized (Muller, J.-C. 1981; Claessen and Oosten 1996b: 365; 1996c: 20; Oosten 1996; Muller J. 1997; Kochakova 1999: 10, 22–29, 42; Claessen 2000c: 182–186; Earle 2002; Smith, Michael E. 2004: 80). In the final analysis, Godiner (1991: 51) is generally right pointing out (though a bit too toughly) that any, even the most sophisticated, theory of the state reduces it to the "specialized institution of managing the society" (see also Belkov 1995: 171–175); at least, the theories tend to center round such an institution. So, I shall agree with Charles Spencer's (1998: 5) elegantly simple dictum (the first part of which I have already just quoted above 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). As

Eisenstatdt (1971: 74, 76) emphasizes, states and non-states differ not in presence or absence of political centralization but in "… the degree of structural differentiation with which they present themselves. … Primitive societies can therefore be said to have a decentralized centrality – if this expression is not too paradoxical." "A state administration, from this perspective, is inherently bureaucratic", Spencer (2003: 11185) resumes (see also Flannery 1972: 403; Cohen 1978a; 1978b: 36; Britan and Cohen 1983; Spencer and Redmond 2004: 173).

### 4. The Weber's legacy: bureaucracy, violence, legitimation, and political community

Indeed, what makes the administrative apparatus specialized? It becomes specialized when it is "filled" with professional (*i.e.*, permanent and full-time) administrators thus forming bureaucracy. As it is well known, that was Max Weber who elaborated the most authoritative concept of bureaucracy (see, *e.g.*, Vitkin 1981) and his ideas form an implicit or explicit background for most of influential modern theories of the state (though implicitly the idea of professional administration as a distinctive feature of the state was singled out in anthropology rather long before him, particularly by Morgan [1877]: actually, this is what he meant writing about separation of power from the populace as the second of the state's three distinctive features; as it is well known, also before Weber this idea was developed in Morgan's vein and under his direct influence by Engels [1985/1884]). While not all the famous Weber's ten features of bureaucracy can be applied to preindustrial states (*vide stricto* Shifferd 1987: 48–49)[17], 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 [1996c: 5–6; Claessen 2003: 162], Kristiansen [1998: 45, 46], Johnson, A. W. and Earle [2000: 248], Chabal, Feinman, and Skalnнk [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 present as such if a given society is attributed as a state.

Recently Alain Testart (2004) has made an attempt to create a theory of the "prebureaucratic" state which, within the theory's framework, historically preceded the "bureaucratic state" while sometimes the former actually never transformed into the latter due to these or those particular circumstances which varied from case to case. The political system in non-bureaucratic states is based, according to Testart, on personal fidelity to a monarch of his retinue, royal slaves and "brothers by blood" being the closest to him, followed by clients, mercenaries, refugees, and debtors. With respect to this theory I shall note that it definitely captures an important mechanism of the *process* of state formation, before him most clearly represented in literature on state formation in medieval Europe with respect to political leaders' military

retine.  We must pay attention to the fact that all those whom Testart writes about, were people who this or that way fell out of the kin net (the same as "true" bureaucrats) and thus had to (or could) pay allegiance to the monarch only, depend exclusively on him, serve him, and thus strengthen the central, suprakin and supracommunity, authority.  However, some of the societies Testart discusses at the point (the Scythians, the medieval Mongols, a number of medieval and modern African kingdoms, etc.) were organized along kin lines not only politically but also socially, what, even leaving apart the fact, natural under such circumstances, that these societies lacked bureaucracy, does not allow us (following, *e.g.*, Gutnov [2001], Kradin [2000b; 2003], Skrynnikova [2000; 2002], Vansina [1992], Skalník [2002], and some other contemporary specialists) to designate them as states (see below), while as for such a specific example as the Greek *polis*, I believe its principally non- and even antibureaucratic nature does not give right to consider it within the Testart theory's framework at all.  The *polis* was not a case in which prebureaucratic state was not independently succeeded by bureaucratic owe to some purely historical circumstances, what can be admitted speculatively, with more or less degree of probability, for some other societies which Testart analyses; the *polis* clearly had no internal intention and potential for such transformation.

I think the weak point of Testart's generally high-quality work is his following the Weberian idea (Weber 1946/1918) (also picked up, in particular, by Wittfogel [1957: 239]; Service [see note 12], Claessen and Skalník [1978c: 18; 1978d: 630; 1981b: 487, 492], and many others [see Vitkin 1981; Kradin 1991: 272; 1995: 45, 46–47; Bondarenko 1993b: 192]) that the state begins with the appearance of "the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force." However, the monopoly of violence defined as loosely as it was done by Weber (even with Testart's specification that "monopoly" is not a proper term for the situation when private persons and corporations also exercise coercive power as, for example, slave-owners over slaves [2005: 82–83; see also Vliet 2005][18]) can be found in a great number of definitely stateless societies.  For instance, was physical force used by African and Melanesian secret societies or Polynesian chiefs illegal, and hence subjected to rightful resistance, within the respective cultures' context, at least before the imposition of colonial and postcolonial political systems?  Clearly, facts just of this sort were taken into consideration by Radcliffe-Brown who in *Foreword* to *African Political Systems* (1987/1940: XXIII) extrapolated the Weberian definition to societies of all kinds, not states only: "The political organization of a society is that aspect of the total organization which is concerned with the control and regulation of the use of physical force" (see also *Ibid.*: XIV).  Many other (though not all [Schapera 1956: 208]) structuralists of the mid-20th century, being influenced by Radcliffe-Brown (1987/1940: XXIII), tended to discredit the right to exercise coercive authority as a feature typical of the state organization arguing that it characterizes any political system (Fortes and

Evans-Pritchard 1987/1940b: 6; Mair 1970/1962: 16–20; 1965: 101–102). Contrary to them, Marxists do not hesitate to assign coercion as an exclusive characteristic of the state, but their approach is more specific compared to Weber's, in fact, the broadest possible definition: according to the Marxists, not any but only "ripe", that is class-based, coercion distinguishes the state from prestate forms of socio-political organization. Actually, this is the core of the Marxist "class approach" to the phenomenon of the state (though in anthropology in general this idea is rooted owe to other Max Weber's [1947/1922; 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 prestate 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).

Yet another problem with the Weberian postulate arises from the fact that even in the states of the ancient East famous for firmly established monarchical regimes and codified written laws that explicitly proclaimed the authority's monopoly of violence completely legal, it could be, and not so rarely was, considered dubious and arguable by various social and political forces including parts of the elite (Glassner 2004: 38–39). Indeed, many early state rulers could not boast of being monopolists in the sphere of physical force use (Carneiro 1981a: 68; 1987: 768; Gellner 1991/1983: 28–29; Grinin 2004a: 439–440). The real legitimate right to coerce should not be made the central point of the state concept because it is a dependent variable itself: if it is reached by the powers that be, it happens as an outcome of the two-way legitimation process in which the common people's aspirations must be understood and met by a state ideology in order to achieve their consent for the present power's existence; no political regime can survive for a long time basing on coercion exclusively or even primarily (see, *e.g.*, Trigger 1985; Beetham 1991; Claessen 1994; Claessen and Oosten 1996a).

As for contemporainty, Clifford Geertz (2004: 579) has recently elaborated on the evident fact that the concept of the state as the expression of "the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force" in a territory is too problematic when the focus is on the majority of the Third World states burdened by tribalism, regionalism, warlordism and other phenomena of the sort due to which the central authorities' monopoly of violence is, openly or not but in any case constantly and largely successfully, discredited as citizens' loyalties tend to remain with the non-state institutions. The view that the Weberian formulation of the state's most essential feature is inappropriate for the study of state-making in contemporary world is also shared by many political anthropologists on the other grounds – that the present-day states have very different histories reflected in peoples' mentalities in different ways what

influences immediately the particular states' nature. Given this, those anthropologists argue, the coercive concept of contemporary state cannot claim for universal applicability; at best it may be relevant for cases from a limited part of the world (see Nustad 2002). Thus, the crucial point is with whom the monopoly of the legitimate use of force rests and how it is legitimized. In my opinion, the specifics of monopoly of the legitimate violence in a state society is precisely that it is exercised through and by bureaucrats who operate within bureaucratic institutions.

So, as Jonathan Haas (1995: 18) writes, the presence of "institutional bureaucracies" is among "basic characteristics… standing at the heart of the state form of organization" which is shared by all societies eligible for being labeled as states, including the earliest, "prestine" ones (see also Johnson, A. W. and Earle 2000: 35). In the meantime, even most complex among all complex chiefdoms, like the Olmecs (*e.g.*, Earle 1990; Grove 1997), Cahokia (*e.g.*, Pauketat 1994; Milner 1998), the Powhatan paramountcy (*e.g.*, Potter, S. R. 1993; Rountree and Turner III 1998), or Hawai'i (*e.g.*, Earle 1978; 1997; 2000; Johnson, A. W. and Earle 2000: 281–294) notwithstanding their political sophistication,[19] 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 10th – mid-12th centuries (see Bondarenko 2001: 108–117), characterized by me in detail as a complex chiefdom elsewhere (Bondarenko 2000b: 102–103; 2001: 133–135; 2004a: 340).

# III

# Was There Benin Bureaucracy?

**1. Weber's theory *vs*. Benin realities**

So, it looks reasonable to examine the list of the bureaucrats' characteristic features Max Weber singled out. Do they fit titled chiefs – administrators of the 13th – 19th centuries Benin Kingdom?[20] (See also Bondarenko 2001: 212–250; 2002; 2005b). Weber (1947/1922: 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 bureaucrats, *i.e.*, professional administrators?[21]

The administrative system of the Kingdom formed in its most important features during the 13th – mid-15th centuries and remained basically the same till the end of the country's independence (introduction of the title of Queen Mother – *Iyoba* in the 16th century may be recognized as the only important innovation in this sphere of the subsequent period). From the mid-15th century on, mostly a redistribution of functions and amount of power between the supreme ruler and titled chiefs, on the one hand, and among different categories of the chiefs, on the other hand, was taking place.

Every titled chief in Benin belonged to one of 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 rather few hereditary titles in the 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 15<sup>th</sup> century seven of them), and of several other, less important dignitaries. The *Uzama N'Ihinron* was established in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by the first ruler of the Second (*Oba*) Dynasty – Eweka I by means of reformation of the analogous First (*Ogiso*) Dynasty period council (see Bondarenko 2001: 112–117, 169–171, 213–216; 2003a: 77–80), and the majority of other hereditary titles either also had their history rooted in the *Ogiso*s period, or appeared mainly in the times of *Oba*s Ewedo and Ewuare in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> and mid-15<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively (see Egharevba 1956: 6; 1974: 12; Palau Marti 1960: 81; Eweka, E. B. 1992: 29, 39–40, 41).

Within the *Uzama N'Ihinron* titles passed from fathers to elder sons and were got officially during a special ceremony performed in *eguae* – the royal palace (Eweka, E. B. 1992: 145–147; Anonymous 1995: 5). By the 20<sup>th</sup> century evidence, all the *Uzama* resided in settlements situated outside the Benin City inner wall, to the west of the city, and known as "belonging" to this or that kingmaker (Bradbury 1957: 35; Roese 1988: 53, Abb. 1; 1990: 32, Abb. 1; Eweka, E. B. 1992: 154–157; Roese *et al*. 2001: 557–558). Evidently, they found themselves beyond the city between the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> and mid-15<sup>th</sup> centuries: just during this period the Benin City walls were erected on the one hand, while on the other hand, in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century the *Oba*s themselves still lived in the palace situated in the *Uzama*'s district of the city. By pressing the *Uzama N'Ihinron* members out of the administrative and ritual center, the sacral space which the capital was for the Binis – the founders of the Benin polity (Bondarenko 1995a: 34–35, 278–279; 1996d: 73–74; 1997b: 98), the *Oba*s tried to protect themselves and their power from the kingmakers' encroachments.

The *Uzama* members exercised great enough power over the inhabitants of the settlements in their possession pressing them through local chiefs. All of them except the *Oloton* (Bradbury 1957: 35; Eweka, E. B. 1992: 37) were free to endow titles in within their possessions' realms. Due to this each of the *Uzama* maintained a court "with palace associations organized on similar lines to those of the *Oba*, though on a smaller scale…" (Bradbury 1957: 35). Being the collectors of tribute for the *Oba* from their dependent territories, the *Uzama N'Ihinron* had the right either to leave a part of it for themselves or to surtax communalists in their favor.

However, in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, after *Oba* Ewedo's military victory over them followed by reforms, the political role of the *Uzama*, official kingmakers, decreased considerably. Enthronization of a new supreme ruler was fixed as the main task of the *Uzama N'Ihinron* as a collective body because just they had initiated the advent of Oranmiyan from Ife (Bradbury 1957: 36; Roese 1988: 70; Bondarenko 2001: 169–171; 2003a: 77–80). Meanwhile, from the Ewedo time the *Uzama* were deprived from their bygone key administrative functions and powers including the right to select a new *Oba*, not to crown him

only.  Contrary to a number of other precolonial African polities (for example, Bamum, Kuba, Swazi, Oyo) in which kingmakers councils really chose and in some cases could depose the supreme ruler (*e.g.*, Palau Marti 1960: 190–192; Bradbury 1964: 154–155; Tardits 1988: 703), in Benin only the oral historical tradition and myths (see Butcher 1937: 349–352) kept the memory of the *Uzama*'s former role.  After Ewedo the man who was to become the next *Oba* was actually chosen by the royal kin members themselves or by palace chiefs, and the "kingmakers" only confirmed their decision what was not an act of political struggle but merely a ritual not dangerous for the dynasty.  As for the right to dispose the supreme ruler, it looks like the *Uzama*s have never had it at all.

Besides their common obligation to enthrones a new supreme ruler, almost each of the *Uzama*s performed some individual duties: the *Oliha* was a priest (of the united cult of all the *Uzama* members' ancestors in particular [Bradbury 1957: 36; Eweka, E. B. 1992: 38]), the *Ezomo* was a general, the *Ero* was the keeper of the main, north-western city gate and a priest (later he was also responsible for the Queen Mother and Crown Prince – *Edaiken*), *Eholo N'Ire* was a priest, the *Oloton* was in charge of one of the most important all-Benin altars and together with the *Edaiken*, made important announcements and distributed the *Uzama*s' income (Talbot 1926: II, 308; Bradbury 1957: 36; Palau Marti 1960: 82–83; Sidahome 1964: 127; Roese 1988: 52–55; Eweka, E. B. 1992: 37–38).

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* ("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 characterized by Alan Ryder (1969: 5) as "coup d'йtat".  Initially the institution of palace chiefs was destined to counterbalance the kingmakers in the sovereign's favor.  It was formed by heads of noble families (probably, of the city first settlers), but those families were not so noble as the clans of the *Uzama* members, all of which had already been involved into administrative activities by the accession of the Second dynasty.  However, among twenty-nine palace chiefs' titles were not only newly established but also several ones that had already existed by that moment (Bradbury 1957: 36; Egharevba 1960: 11; Palau Marti 1964: 76–79).  The head of the palace chiefs was invested with the title of *Uwangue*.

The *Eghaevbo N'ogbe* members were kept by their extensive agricultural households (Bradbury 1957: 36–37).  Besides, they received half of the tribute which they collected for the *Oba* from some villages, had a share in court fines, in collections from heads of craft unions on the occasions of their installation (Nyendael 1705: 452–453; Anonymous 1746: 103; Isichei 1983: 188; Agbontaen 1995: 122–123).

The structure of the *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe* reproduced the Binis' age-grade system as it was divided into three groups (*otu-eguae*): *Iwebo* (elder), *Iweguae* (middle), and *Ibiwe* (younger) (for detail see: Bradbury 1957: 37–38; Picton 1997: 23–24). Not by chance the names of the three groups and of the age-grades were similar: *otu-eguae* and *otu* respectively. To be correct, palace chiefs formed the core of each of these groups as some other administrators were their members either (Roese 1988: 55–61, 68; 1993; Eweka, E. B. 1992: 47–80, 214; Picton 1997: 22–23). There also was internal gradation in each of the groups: into two more and three less highly ranked subgroups of palace chiefs (Bradbury 1957: 37–39).

Members of each of the *otu-eguae* had a specific set of duties to perform for the supreme ruler. Speaking generally, the *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe* were administrators, generals, priests, masters of ceremonies (Egharevba 1956: 28; Dike 1959: 13; Bradbury 1969: 22; Nevadomsky and Inneh 1984: 48–50). Besides membership in the royal council, they had another common duty: to control the activities of palace craft unions (Eweka, E. B. 1992: 53–57, 69–77, 79–80; Agbontaen 1995: 119–123). The *Oba*s' deputies in the annexed lands (the *Onotueyevbo*) were also responsible at them, first of all for regularity and totality of the tribute they had to pay to the Benin supreme ruler (Roese 1993: 437).

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. No doubt, supreme rulers could find some possibilities for maneuvering among the palace chiefs' associations trying to push them against each other. However, the measure of the *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe* members' corporativity was high enough and their common importance as of a titled chiefs category was great. In particular, Agbontaen (1995: 119) writes about the palace chiefs: "On the political plane, these were the channels through which palace functions were differentiated. They were avenues for channeling competitions among the groups, and indirectly enabling the *Oba* to maintain stability and political balance between competing groups" of administrators. The *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe* acquired their might due not only to their official titles and rights but also, maybe even first of all, owe to their physical proximity to the supreme ruler. One of their main tasks was to serve mediators between the *Oba* and the people (Agbontaen 1995), 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 (Nyendael 1705: 435; Smith, W. 1744: 228–230; Roth 1968/1903: 92; Anonymous 1969/1652: 309; Ryder 1969: 103; Нηjar 1972/1654: 248–249; Dapper 1975/1668: 503; Dantzig

1978/1674–1742: 334).  Eventually, in the 17th century the palace chiefs, and not the royal lineage or the *Uzama* members furthermore, played the decisive part in selection of the descendent to the throne (Ryder 1969: 16–18).

Although the supreme rulers' power increased for some time after the Ewedo's reforms, by the reign of Ewuare (mid-15th century) the palace chiefs had threatened it not less than the *Uzama*s did it earlier.  That is why the *Oba* had to make a new "coup" by establishing another major category of non-hereditary title-holders, the *Eghaevbo N'Ore* ("town chiefs").  They were destined to counterbalance palace chiefs, just like the latter once were to serve as counterbalance to the *Uzama*.  The similarity between the two historical collisions became even more striking as officially town chiefs were ranked lower than palace chiefs were, just as the latter were recognized inferior to kingmakers.

The *Eghaevbo N'Ore* consisted of nineteen title holders (Bradbury 1957: 37) who were heads of kin groups, less noble than those of the *Uzama*s and *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe*s.  The *Eghaevbo N'Ore* members, like once the palace chiefs, got titles of generals, priests, judges and so forth (Nyendael 1705: 435; Egharevba 1960: 82).  They also participated in administrative supervision of some Bini villages and of annexed lands.  The head of the corporation was the *Iyase* whose own individual title was introduced much earlier, in the mid-13th century, by *Oba* Ewedo.

The *Eghaevbo N'Ore* did struggle actively with the *Eghaevbo N'Ogbe* for opportunities to influence the *Oba*s, but also immediately fought for power with the supreme rulers themselves.  All in all, the town chiefs were a success.  For example, in the mid-18th century William Smith related (1744: 234–236) that the *Oba* had turned out unable to dispose several town chiefs hated by him but popular with the common folk.  The *Eghaevbo N'Ore* members became very powerful but they could surpass the community organization even to a less degree than the palace chiefs for while the latter were strong by their proximity to the *Oba*, just masses of Benin City communalists were the *Eghaevbo N'Ore*'s support.  That remained so even when the town chiefs found themselves among the wealthiest people in the country due to receiving remuneration for military, judicial, priestly, and other activities to what half of the tribute they collected for the supreme ruler added (Isichei 1983: 188). Only when they overcame the *Oba*s' resistance and the *Iyase* got the position of commander-in-chief (early 17th century), when they became at least as powerful as the palace chiefs, the *Eghaevbo N'Ore* members stopped being dependent on the common communalists' support so crucially.

The *Iyase* opposed himself to the *Oba* from the very beginning being both influential in the summit and popular with town-dwellers.  In the course of time this title's holder 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" (for detail see Egharevba 1947). Obayemi (1976: 251) even arrives at the conclusion (which yet seems an exaggeration) that "[t]he subsequent role of the *Iyase* as the focal point of opposition to the *Oba* makes the creation of this (the *Iyase*'s. – *D. B.*) office… a turning point in Benin history". Igbafe (1975: 11) rightly points at the most important feature of the *Iyase* as the Oba's rival: "… he was easily the chief opponent of the *Oba* recognised traditionally under the Benin political system. He stood as the people's champion against unpopular methods, measures and decisions". Even the supplanting of the British colonial administration could not cease their rivalry (*vide stricto* Omoregie, S. O. 1952: 4–5). As a result, an our-days Bini author of *An Edo-English Dictionary*[22] unequivocally describes *Iyase* as "the title of the most important chief in Benin" (Agheyisi 1986: 77).

After becoming the leader of the *Eghaevbo N'Ore*, the *Iyase* first got such key political positions as the head of the royal council and one of the Crown Prince's keepers. On the brink of the 16th and 17th centuries he was also declared commander-in-chief and got the right to invest chiefly titles on behalf of the *Oba* (Egharevba 1960: 11). That was also the *Iyase* who announced a sovereign's death and headed his burial ceremony (Dennett 1906: 177; Rumann 1914–1915: 36; Egharevba 1949: 71; Nevadomsky 1984: 41; 1993: 70). For the time between *Oba*'s death and *Edaiken*'s enthronization the *Iyase* was recognized as a temporary co-ruler of Benin (together with either the *Ezomo* or the *Iwebo*, *Iweguae*, and *Ibiwe* palace societies – the evidence on this point are contradictory [compare Read 1904: 52; Palau Marti 1964: 222 *vs.* Ajisafe 1945: 24]). The outstanding position of *Iyase*s was stressed and strengthened by the tradition according to which *Oba*s gave them in marriage their elder daughters (Egharevba 1949: 26; 1956: 31; 1962: 7).

Just on the personal might of the *Eghaevbo N'Ore*'s head the competitiveness of the town chiefs as a corporation at the face of their palace *vis-a-vis* was based to no small degree. The *Iyase*'s importance rose especially when the troops led by him started to make raids for slaves then sold to Europeans (Landolphe 1823: 334; Dantzig 1978: 298). The only way for the *Oba* to get rid of a dissatisfying him *Iyase* was to send him to a military campaign in leading which all the other generals proved unsuccessful. In the case of victory the *Iyase* had no right to return to Benin but became the life-long ruler (*Ogie*) of one of the towns conquered by him while a new *Iyase* was not appointed till his death (Ajisafe 1945: 81–82; Egharevba 1956: 34; 1960: 83; 1966: 13; Roese 1992b: 366; Osadolor 2001: 21).

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, one should not think that the supreme ruler could command non-hereditary titles easily, by his own wish. As well as hereditary, these titles were usually

inherited within definite extended families. The matter is that a lineage which held a hereditary title could not lose it anyway, while the *Oba*s in theory had the right to hand a non-hereditary title over to another family, though only after the death of its previous holder (with the remarkable exception of the *Iyase* title). The *Oba*s appointed chiefs just formally, for, first, to be distinct, the sovereign 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 power of 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 [Bradbury 1957: 38; 1969: 22; Atmore and Stacey 1979: 47]).

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 rulers of distant chiefdoms integrated into the Benin polity could be rather weak (Bradbury 1957: 33; 1973: 178) and it may be reasonable to suppose (especially if one trusts the folk-lore 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 (Bradbury 1957: 41) and giving their own daughters in marriage to the chiefs (Egharevba 1956: 31; 1962). 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 (except the *Uzama* whose titles passed by the rule of primogeniture, at least in the ethnographically observable time [Bradbury 1964: 156]). 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). Under the conditions when all the levels of socio-political complexity were penetrated by essentially community 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 (1978: 576) distinguishes 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." Claessen and Skalnнk sample's analysis allowed the former of them 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 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 Binis 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 titled chiefs (at least prior to the period of active trade with Europeans [Ryder 1969; Bondarenko 1995a: 153–157; Roese and Bondarenko 2003: 79–286]) 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 (Dennett 1910: 199; Talbot 1926: III, 434–435, 833; Egharevba 1949: 105; Bradbury 1957: 46;

Sidahome 1964: 143; Anonymous 1969/1652: 313; Kochakova 1981: 208; Eweka, E. B. 1992: 153). 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).

As has been remarked at the outset, the administrative apparatus in Benin was not confined to the *Oba* with his relatives and the three major corporations of titled chiefs. Among other administrators (who could also act as priests or generals) the persons of non-Bini origins who enjoyed the status of royal, or sometimes a nobleman's, slaves are worth special noting if point 1 of Weber is recollected (see Roth 1968/1903: 104; Egharevba 1947: 9; 1960: 17, 29; Igbafe 1979: 26–27; Kochakova 1981: 214; 1986: 122, 151; Bondarenko 1990: 40–41; 1995a: 248–250; 2001: 225–226). At sunset of the Kingdom's history possibly freedmen could be found among administrators, too (see Sidahome 1964: 181).

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 community organization (Bondarenko 1995a: 203–231; 2001: 193–211) while the internal structure of, and relations in the royal and titled chiefs' families remained traditional, too (*Ibid.*: 194–203). 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 enthronization (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,[23] 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.

## 2. The sovereign as supreme administrator

Indeed, though it is evident that the *Oba* shared many non-bureaucratic features of titled chiefs, the present analysis will not be complete if some more attention to the sovereign as supreme administrator is not paid.

In the situation when the basic unit in society was not the individual

but the collectivity, and kinship relations were the background of the whole system of government up to its uppermost level (Bradbury 1957: 31), a new *Oba*, the same way as chiefs, came to power as a representative of his kin group first and foremost. Rather extensive (*Ibid.*: 27–30) royal clan though privileged, had typical for the Bini extended families structure and mechanisms of functioning, including ancestor cult (see Rumann 1914–1915; Hall 1922) 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). In the course of time the political role of the royal kin was not diminishing but, quite the opposite, increasing due to the necessity to attract *Oba*s' sons and brothers to governing annexed territories and to introduction of the *Iyoba* (Queen Mother) title. So, what Lloyd (1962: 47) wrote about the supreme rulers of the Yoruba is applicable to their Benin "colleague" in full measure: "We must distinguish clearly therefore the rights of the Oba as a member of the royal descent group and as the head of the government…" As another Africanist, Kubbel (1987: 9–10) rightly argues, "the very promotion of a personal leader in society in which kinship ties… played the determinant part had to be a result of rise of the kin group to which this leader belonged in the same measure as a prerequisite for such a rise".

Theoretically, the title of the *Oba* was inherited from father to senior son. But till the time of Ewuare all the sons who belonged to the same age-grade were considered as people of the same (social) age and hence as legitimate claimants for the throne. Thus, the whole royal lineage (*egbe umogun*) and not an *Oba*'s immediate, nuclear (small), family was in legitimate possession of the title. As a result, "[i]n Benin the dispute is always between the two oldest sons of the late *Oba*, each claimed by his faction to be true legitimate first son. In retrospect the successful claimant is always said to have been the rightful one, a view which follows from the dictum that 'kings are made in heaven'" (Bradbury 1964: 154). However, in practice prior to Ewuare's reforms the throne was often inherited by brothers of deceased supreme rulers, and reproduction of the collision, typical of the extended family (which, though privileged, the royal family in fact was) thus took place. Ewuare made an attempt actually to abolish for the *egbe umogun* its members' division by age-grades and to legalize the right of biological primogeniture at the inheritance of power (with what the introduction of the Crown Prince – *Edaiken* title and including of its bearer into *Uzama N'Ihinron* as its last, seventh, member was connected [Egharevba 1960: 18; see also: Bondarenko 2001: 182–183, 220–221]). This way, for the sake of avoiding conflicts at passing of the throne, Ewuare tried to prevent its passage to a new *Oba* by the extended family model: according to the age-grades norms and within lineage, not nuclear family. But the Ewuare's attempt was not

crowned with success. Only in the 16th – very beginning of the 17th century by Egharevba (1960: 27–34) or only during the first seven decades of the 16th century if we believe Talbot (1926: I, 166–167; III, 563), in most cases *Oba*s' sons (and not always really first-borns) became *Oba*s themselves. Notably, just this was the period of Benin's peak, and the necessity to ensure the effectiveness of her expansion dictated strengthening of central power. After that late *Oba*s' brothers ascended the throne more and more frequently again. Not accidentally in the early 18th century *Oba* Ewuakpe had to repeat the attempt of Ewuare; however, great success skirted him either (Egharevba 1960: 44; Ikime 1980: 120). Members of the same age-grade, disregarding their exact biological sequence by birth, were regarded as being of the same age, thus equally proximate to ancestors (*erha*) and hence having basically equal rights to claim for an office, in a community or in the kingdom. The principle of socio-generational statuses' change remained the key one for the whole system of governing the Benin society (Bradbury 1973: 165). Possibly, the popular with the Binis myth that tells how the high god Osanobua divided the world among his three sons (McClelland 1971: 11; Ben-Amos 1980: 45; Gallagher 1983: 23; Rosen 1989: 45–46) could both reflect the social fact of one age-grade members' equality in rights and promote further substantiation of this idea in their minds. Thus, the sovereigns were defeated in the struggle for autocracy as they turned out incapable to destroy or essentially transform the age-grade system which prevents the change of the basic line of social interaction from that between collectivities to interpersonal relations and hence establishment of autocracy.

The claims of the royal clan 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' dual – both divine and human pedigree. They claimed descent from the father of the semilegendary Second dynasty's founder Oranmiyan – Oduduwa, a deity, the first supreme ruler (*Oni*) of the sacred Yoruba town of Ife (called Uhe by the Binis), and his wife, a Bini woman. Already this myth could invest the dynasty with an infinite mandate for the rule. However, beside it, there was 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, 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 mandate was a source of continuing political conflict for the *Oba*, it was also the ultimate source of his power" (*Ibid.*).

The *Oba* was invariably officially recognized as omnipotent and the possessor of all (land, people, etc.) in his realm (*e.g.*, Dapper 1975/1668: 168;

1671: 491; Thomas, N. W. 1910a: I, 91; Ajisafe 1945: 25, 75, 95; Bradbury 1957: 44; Akenzua, S. I. A. 1974: 3; Jones 1983: 40) what was confirmed by many of his titles, like *enonyagbon* ("master of the land") or *obayagbon* ("the *Oba* holds the world").  However, neither all the land nor all the people in the realm belonged to the sovereign in reality (as some keen European visitors understood clearly [Nyendael 1705: 430; Smith, W. 1744: 228; Gallwey 1893: 129]).  Particularly, the Binis did not know private property in the politico-economic sense, land in their country was held by communities being regarded as belonging to the ancestors.  The Binis were sure in their specific, but not proprietary, relations with the land: the people and the land were perceived as in essence non-alienable from each other (Talbot 1926: II, 164, 308; III, 713, 737; Egharevba 1949: 84; for detail, see Bondarenko 1995a: 98, 149–152).  According to Kalous's (1970: 83–84) correct remark, in Benin the very idea of private land ownership could have looked "absurd".  It did not appear even under the Europeans' influence, including the colonial period (Rцmer 1769: 94; Thomas, N. W. 1910a: I, 91; Ajisafe 1945: 42; Rowling 1948; Bradbury 1957: 44–45; Sidahome 1964: 102–103, 128; Ogbobine 1974: 13–15; Nwankwo 1987: 47–49, 50).  The *Oba* was not a real landholder or furthermore proprietor even of the plots a part of harvest from which went for his support (Dennett 1910: 199; Egharevba 1949: 77; Ogbobine 1974: 17; Nwankwo 1987: 48).  When an external threat to the country appeared, the Binis used to say: "Truly this is my father's land and it does not belong to the *Oba* alone; then I must do my utmost to defend my father's land" (Egharevba 1959: 34).  Only war captives and criminals could be slaves in the proper sociological sense (*e.g.*, Ajisafe 1945: 75–76; Egharevba 1949: 65–66).

The title that reflected the part the Binis assigned to their sovereign most exactly, was *obarehiagbon* – "*Oba* is the guard of the world" (Omoruyi 1981: 14).  The phrases like "all the land in Benin belongs to the *Oba* and all her inhabitants are his slaves" served for expressing the attitude to him as to the guarantee of the country and populace's prosperity.  This formula also served to express the idea of all the Benin citizens' supracommunal unity symbolized and personalized by the sovereign.  Not by chance the notions of "subject" and "slave" are expressed in the Bini language by one and the same word – *ovie* (Bradbury 1973: 181).  The name of "the *Oba*'s slave", that is to be considered as his subject, was honorary and only men could have the right to be called so (Nyendael 1705: 430, 444).  As for the idea of the *Oba*'s omnipotence, it did not prevent the commoners from recognition as necessary of the separation of powers between him and titled chiefs, as this idea was rooted in the perception as completely legal of the division of duties in many local communities between the sacral "master of the land" (*odionwere*) and the "profane" ruler titled *onogie* that appeared in the early 2nd millennium (see Bondarenko 1995a: 183–194; 1995c; 2001: 55–63 and below, section 4 of this chapter) and thus preexisted the political system of the Kingdom, as well as the Kingdom as such.

In any case, the Bini mass consciousness did not treat material values as an exceptionally important criterion of anyone's dignity. As Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1987/1940b: 8) wrote, in Africa "[d]istinctions of rank, status, or occupation operate independently of differences of wealth".[24] Indeed, in Benin much greater, really tremendous, importance was vested in social values – status, prestige, the kin net's width (see Bondarenko 1995a: 31, 52, 59 *et al.*). This made the *Oba* (as well as titled chiefs) to give out a certain amount of material values to his subjects at festivals (Barbot 1746: 365; Roth 1968/1903: 74) and practise other kinds of charity; for example, to support a number of paupers at the court (Nyendael 1705: 438–439). "The ruler, who is in the eyes of the population embodies the state, is expected to be open-handed. He must give in order to legitimize his position. The mere fact of his presenting a gift compensates the recipient for everything he has done for him", Claessen (1984: 367) generalizes with respect to the societies he labels as early states.[25]

Nevertheless, by no means the supreme ruler was a poor and unselfish obligor for the Benin folk. "To maintain the elaborate political system, the *Oba*'s support and the maintenance of his palace was accepted as a basic economic responsibility of the people" (Igbafe 1975: 12). It goes without saying that he had opportunities for accumulation of, and profiting by riches. Among such opportunities there were regular tribute collected from the whole populace twice a year, additional and extraordinary requisitions (for example for repairs in the palace), tolls for entering a city gate, trade tolls, court fines, payments for chiefs' investiture, inheritance of parts of subjects' property after their deaths, and so on and so forth (see Svanidze1968: 108–110; Igbafe 1975: 12; 1980: 21–23; Kochakova 1986: 262; Bondarenko 1993a: 152–155).

With respect to the *Oba*'s nature as political figure and his true role in government (with what I am concerned now), it must be noted that 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 1975/1668: 167–169; Talbot 1926: III, 581–590; Egharevba 1949: 29–33; 1960: 78–82; Bradbury 1957: 35–39) including the royal 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 dialectics of the relations between profane functions and sacral duties was crucial at this point (for detail see: Bondarenko 1995a: 203–257; 2001: 193–229; 2003c; 2005d).

The institution of the *Oba* appeared as a combination of profane functions and sacral duties in one person. It would have also been wrong to look at Benin titled chiefs as completely secular figures: in Africa any political responsibilities implicitly if not explicitly had a political dimension as "religion

and power are perceived as indissolubly related" (Vincent, J.-F. 1993: 48; besides numerous case studies proving this [Kuper 1947; Evans-Pritchard 1956; Turner 1967; etc., etc.], see general considerations on the point, *e.g.*: Gluckman 1962; 1965; Mair 1965: 206–232; Balandier 1967: Ch. 5; Lvova 1984: 163– 167; 1996: 155–165; Bocharov 1994; Pirzio-Biroli 2001/1978: 223–229)[26]. However, the sacral aspect was not so important for substantiation of the Benin chiefs' power as it was for the supreme ruler, it could not prevent them from effective exercising of the administrative duties and pursuing policy favorable for their corporate and individual rational, practical goals.

As for the *Oba*, his power rested on the idea of his sacredness, its real amount was determined by it in the decisive measure either. Sacrality restricted the supreme ruler inevitably. It was considered that just strict observation of all the inscribed taboos (see, *e.g.*, Adams 1823: 111–113; Talbot 1926: III, 736– 737) made him almighty both in the profane and "irrational" respects (the latter meant the abilities to communicate with spirits, call the rain, etc.). However, in reality numerous taboos up to the prohibition to communicate with the subjects freely, had been more and more depriving the *Oba* from the opportunity to govern the country in the course of time. The necessity to observe all the ritual bans left the supreme ruler practically isolated and defenseless at the face of corporations of his relatives and chiefs who hardly took his sacrality into account. By Natalia Kochakova's (1986: 201) calculation, according to the oral historical tradition as it was held down by Jacob Egharevba, "nineteen out of thirty-five rulers of the precolonial period, that is more than every second, either conquered the throne by force, or suppressed mutinies during their reigns, or were killed, or dethroned."

On the other hand, sacrality presupposed automatically that the sovereign possessed a set of dignities (might, justice, wisdom, physical and spiritual strength, etc., etc.) in absolute completeness of each of them. The supreme ruler's image had no defects; it remained the same at changes of people on the throne and naturally could have very little to do with their real personalities. The Bini ideal of the ruler and the human being in general – this is what was embodied in the sovereign's image. What was sacralized was not a concrete supreme title holder but the very institution of supreme ruler. His cult was the cult of him only due to his possession of the *Oba* title but not the cult of his personality. In fact, every *Oba* served merely as a temporal container of what was really worshipped – the eternal sacral force vested in the supreme authority. In the supreme ruler or to be correct, in his image the Bini's consciousness united sides of different binary oppositions (see Bradbury 1973: 250) without any care of possibility or impossibility to combine incompatible. The sovereign was perceived by his subjects as at one time "for and against, right and left, a human being and deity; he unites oppositions in himself, he exists for the sake of this unification" (Palau Marti 1964: 218). The *Oba* was not a "deity among people" (Mercier 1962: 103–127) (though from early time

he was regarded as the one who had specifically close relations with several deities of the Bini pantheon [*e.g.*, Dennett 1906: 181; Sharevskaja 1947; Egharevba 1949: 84; 1951b: 37, 52; Bradbury 1957: 54; Pasztory 1970: 301; Nevadomsky 1988: 77–78]): in reality, for the Bini their ruler was situated on the brink of the two worlds and bound them with each other.

In the sphere of administrative building proper, when Ewuare established the *Eghaevbo N'Ore* composed of non-aristocratic kin units heads, the opportunities for further development of the administrative apparatus by the initial "extensive" model, that is by means of creating new all-Benin institutions and "filling" them with communities leaders, were practically exhausted. Thus, at the very moment of Benin's transformation into "empire"[27] during the reign of Ewuare thus called *Ogidigan* – "the Great", the limit of evolution and simultaneously peak of expediency of the Second dynasty's administrative system were reached. Due to this Benin's active expansion became possible not to a small degree. However, the common victory of Ewuare and all his predecessors was Pyrrhic: after the most plebeian by origin category of titled chiefs, the town chiefs, went to opposition to the supreme rulers either, the *Oba*s left without any serious support in the summit and lost the profane power once and for all.

So, the struggle between the sovereign and the chiefs – the typical prime-mover of political processes in precolonial African kingdoms (Lloyd 1968: 322) – took the form of introduction of new titled chiefs categories to counterbalance those introduced for the same purpose earlier by *Oba*s, on the one hand, and of constant and gradually successful chiefs' attempts to limit the sovereign's profane power by means of inflicting on him new binding taboos[28] and hence *volens nolens* increasing his sacrality inversely proportional, on the other hand. The final act ran high in the early 17th century when the chiefs succeeded in depriving the *Oba* of "the last argument of kings" – the right to command the army in person (Egharevba 1960: 32–33, 34; for the whole story see Bondarenko 2000e). Till that moment this position had given the *Oba*s a possibility though in severe struggle, but to defeat rebellious chiefs in the majority of cases. But the degree of the supreme ruler's sacrality was increasing and the volume of his profane power was correspondingly diminishing. As a result, in the beginning of the 17th century the *Oba* lost the military power and turned into an honorable prisoner in his palace once and for all. 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 1904/1588: 298; Nyendael 1705: 449; Gallwey 1969/1892: 345, 346; 1893: 129; Boisragon 1898: 165; Leonard 1906: 372; Egharevba 1952: 14;[29] Bindloss 1968/1898: 205). In view of the question of who in reality possessed the profane power in those times, it is remarkable that from the late 16th century titled chiefs in fact usurped profitable trade (and also

diplomatic and missionary) relations with the Europeans despite the *Oba*s' formal absolute monopoly on them (see, *e.g.*, Ryder 1969; Salvadorini 1972; Roese and Bondarenko 2003: 79–314). In the 19th century even ritual regicides of supreme rulers used to happen (Rowlands 1993) though in Benin a legitimate (institutionalized) procedure of getting rid of an objectionable sovereign has never been introduced (Bradbury 1964: 154).

Thus sacralization of the supreme ruler's institution first consolidated the *Oba*s' achievements in the struggle for profane power with the chiefs but finally turned to the sovereigns the opposite side. Sacralization of the *Oba* which had been increasing gradually since the Second dynasty's consolidation and reached the "peak of expediency" (from the supreme rulers interests' viewpoint) under Ewuare, then revealed itself as the main mechanism of the *Oba*s' deprivation from the levers of profane control by titled chiefs. So, the period of true though always relative independence of the *Oba*s from titled chiefs lasted for about 350 years, *i.e.*, half of seven centuries of the Second dynasty history in the precolonial time. These three and a half centuries began with the victory of Ewedo over the *Uzama N'Ihinron* in the mid-13th century and came to their end with the sovereign's loss of the commander-in-chief position on the brink of the 16th and 17th centuries.

This became possible due to the specifics of the Bini consciousness in general and political consciousness in particular (see also the next section). In their minds, the true ruler was not the one who holds real (in our rational modern view) control levers but the one who was endowed with sacral power. Benin commoners definitely saw sacral duties as most important and believed that the *Oba*'s profane power was also increasing in the course of his further sacralization, in the result of it (for detail see Bondarenko 2000e). Actually, *Oba*s, beginning with the first one, Eweka I, themselves did a lot to increase the level of their sacralization, especially *Oba* Ewuare of the mid-15th century. The great contribution of this sovereign is remarkable: no doubt it was connected with the increase during his reign of centripetal tendencies in Benin society, consolidation of the royal power, coming to its end in general outline of the all-Benin political institutions system formation, and sharp activization of territorial expansion. These profound transformational processes needed an ideological setting and further stimulation. Sacralization of the all-Benin power in general and the institution of supreme ruler in particular could and did become such an ideological pillar.

By no means did *Oba*s become powerless after the profane power's passing to the chiefs: 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). Although what was sacralized was not a concrete *Oba*'s personality but the very power and institution of the supreme ruler (Nkanta and Arinze n.d.: 5),[30] not only in the Binis' minds but objectively as well, by the vary 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, the focus and guard of the people's cultural tradition and identity, and thus did promote significantly integration of socio-political segments into a whole – centralization in its socio-territorial aspect. This is the real socio-political significance of the essentially irrational supreme ruler's sacral power. Characteristically, the notions of "reign", "kingdom", and "government are expressed in the Edo (Bini) language by one and the same word – *arioba*, and as a "barbarian", "foreigner" (*ete*) in Benin 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* (as his or her sovereign. – *D. B.*)" (Melzian 1937: 10, 43). Especially significant part in *Oba*s' effective fulfillment of the integrative role was played by their status of the realm's high (supreme) priest. Sovereigns played the central part in performing rites of most important all-Benin cults including those of the agrarian cycle and immediately connected with royalty: of the *Oba*'s ancestors – *ugie erha oba* (the main holiday in the country from the mid-15th century on), his good luck and hand (see Sidahome 1964: 1; Kochakova 1984; 1986: 225–233; Bondarenko 1995: 203–231; 2001: 193–211; 2003c; 2005d; Roese and Bondarenko 2003: 26–32). As Marc Абйлиs (1981: 3) underlines, "[t]he rites of sacred kingship are centered on the social drama in which all members of the society take part."

To sum up, although it may seem paradoxical, the role of the supreme ruler in Benin history was becoming as greater as less his profane power (the only true one in the modern people's minds) was turning out. The folk "... was bound together by the reverence felt for... the *Oba* of Benin..." (Talbot 1926: III, 563; see also Eweka, E. B. 1992: 82, 83). The 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 1974: 175; see also Zotova 1979: 105–114; Nevadomsky 1993: 66–67).

### 3. The rulers and the ruled: political culture as a manifestation of worldview

Naturally (and the history of controversies between sovereigns and titled chiefs is the best possible testimony to this) the mechanisms and tendencies of socio-political transformations did not depend on the role ascribed to power and authorities by the people completely. Even more so, the further the more power was distancing from the Binis' ideal understanding of its nature and tasks. Nevertheless, the influence of political ideas on actual institutions and processes always remained direct and essentially important.

In general, the relations between the rulers (all-Benin authorities) and the ruled (communalists), between the political "whole" embodied in the center

and its "parts" – communities and chiefdoms, were those of mutual necessity and complementary (see section 3 of chapter 4). 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; criticism at Sargent's inadequate attempt to use the Weberian and Marxist categories at the analysis of Benin socio-political system, see in: Manning 1986; Wilks 1986). Belief in myths telling about the supernatural origin of power and its holders, in legality and natural character of inequality and social hierarchy played an important part in determination of communalists' attitude to power and authority. The "intimate" character of the relations between the people and authority led to the situation when central power, embodied in the respective institutions, though towered above the society and established its dominance over it, was not separated from the people in the Morgan – Engels's sense (see Morgan 1877: 7; Engels 1985/1884: 197–198 *vs*. Bradbury 1969: 21; Bondarenko 1993a: 165) what above all signifies that the all-Benin political institutions formation, recruitment of administrators into them, and the way they exercised power were taking 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, as it was shown above. They remained chiefs with all the mechanisms of coming to, and exercising of power, rights, privileges, duties, etc. typical of them.

Massive ideological pillars for this objective situation were also provided (see Bondarenko 2000a; 2000e; 2001: 186–188). It is significant to note at this point that it would be unreasonable to speak about initial imposition of ideology by socio-political summit 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) what also witnesses to lack of unbridgeable gulf between the rulers and the ruled. The ideas of reciprocal exchange of services as the basis of social relations went on dominating among communalists. 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 and its supreme holder except uprisings in subjugated lands (and possibly just one episode in Benin City in the 14th or 15th century – that of *Oba* Ohen's deposition [see Bondarenko 2001: 176–177; Roese and Bondarenko 2003: 76–77]).

Such a trend of the Bini political culture kept easily within their general culture framework, including its mental and behavioral paradigm.[31]

This paradigm sprang from their typical of communal consciousness orientation at stability of life, preference of already known to yet unknown, and concurring (as a rule) of reality with the due. But this so much desirable stability was not a static situation given once and for all. It was perceived as constantly threatened with the prospects of grave internal crisis and irreversible cosmic catastrophe due to the possibility of people's improper behavior, and thus only the ways and acts of behavior that had already proved their fitness for this or that situation were thought to be acceptable, that is allowing to avoid the cosmic catastrophe. Hence, each and every was responsible for realization of the Binis' "national idea": indefatigable vigil about permanent reestablishment of *status quo* as a fragile dynamic equilibrium in all spheres including political; first of all, by proper social behavior aimed at supporting proper relations between the living and the ancestors, as it was firmly believed that upon the former's satisfaction with their offspring the very existence of Benin and the whole universe depended crucially (see Bondarenko 1995a: 73–89, 258–261; 1997b: 111, 119–122).

In this respect, indeed in Benin "everyone is the priest for himself" (Nyendael 1705: 448). Actually, just due to this in the situation when ancestor cult was the basic form of religion in Benin at all levels of complexity from the local to uppermost, priesthood was never organized in a distinct, economically and politically influential corporation (Roth 1968/1903: 50; Sharevskaja 1957: 205; Dike 1959: 13; Kochakova 1986: 145–146, 151; Bondarenko 1995a: 270; see also Bondarenko 1993b: 194).[32]

However, heads of social and political units 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' names. In view of the Binis' general mental-behavioral paradigm, exercising power was seen as not an intervention into, and forced change of the course of events but rather a filigree exact "entering", "inclusion" into the general rhythm of cosmic being. The widest, all-embracing unit (and actually cult group) was Benin society as a whole. The *Oba*, perceived as the father of all Binis, was the supreme mediator in the living – ancestors' relations. Performing rites of a collectivity ancestor cult (*erha*) was regarded as the most important of any leader's tasks. Hence, those valuable people caring of *bien public* deserved just gratitude and help, not preventing from fulfilling their duty. As has been stressed above, encroachment on the authority (*ase*) was thus practically incredible (see Bondarenko 1994: 6–9; 1995a: 182, 260, 276–277). In efficient functioning of the political system people saw the principal guarantee of cosmic stability's preservation and hence, of their personal further well-being. Characteristically, one of the most praising estimations of an *Oba*'s rule in the oral tradition is that in his time people enjoyed "peace and concord" even if this argument contradicts sharply the same tradition's relations about those sovereigns' deeds (*e.g.*, Egharevba 1960: 1, 4, 10, 38 *et al.*). The idea of

power's value and necessity deserving a corresponding attitude to its holders was perceived as something going without saying and vitally important for every Bini. Not occasionally the Second dynasty supreme ruler's title, the *Oba*, may etymologically derive from the word *ooba* that can be translated as "it is difficult."

The student of the Andean Moche culture Bawden has defined as "structural paradox" the collision between social order "embedded in a structural tradition defined by kinship principles" and "elite power, by definition exclusive in nature" that "must be constructed within a context that innately resists it" (1995: 258). As well as in the Moche culture (and many others – *vide stricto* Claessen and Oosten 1996a; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000a), in Benin what provided the means for overcoming the contradiction was ideology. As has been emphasized above, the core of this ideology was the ancestor cult. It was the core of not ideology as a political construct only, but of religion and, in the final analysis, the Binis' world outlook first and foremost. Predominantly just its "philosophy" and morality formed the foundations of the socio-economic and political relations (Bradbury 1965; 1973: 229–250; Willett and Picton 1967; Dean 1983; Aghahowa 1988; Bondarenko 1992b; 1995a: 24–31 *et al.*; 1996b; 1997a; 1997b; 2000a). Precisely due to this the ancestor cult could be so effectively employed in ideology of a polity of the Benin type.

The outstanding early student of Nigerian peoples, including the Binis, Percy Amaury Talbot (1926: II, 298) emphasized basing on his many-year experience of life and work in the country that "[n]o one can hope to appreciate the thoughts and feelings of the black man who does not realise that to him the dead are not dead but living, in full command of all their faculties, including memory, and endowed with greater abilities and powers than when on earth". In its most fundamental spiritual features and their reflections in rituals the ancestor cult of the Binis had very much in common with the same cult of other African and non-African peoples but, as Parrinder (1978: 124–125) pointed out, in the vast ethno-cultural area of the coastal tropical forest extending from Ghana to Eastern Nigeria just among the Binis it was especially profoundly elaborated and played a more important part in private and socio-political life than anywhere else. In our time for the Binis ancestors still "… are never left out in the scheme of things in the society" (Aghahowa 1988: 63). Ancestors were attributed with the ability to influence social life even more actively and crucially than the living.[33] Naturally, the spirits demanded constant care: they were believed to be able to punish their improperly behaving offspring by any calamity one could imagine, including even death (Emowon 1984: 8; Aghahowa 1988: 64–65).

Like fear of the Hell was a "great social fact" in medieval Europe (Bloch 1961/1939–1940), lack of this fear in Benin influenced directly her socio-economic order and especially political culture and system. An early

European visitor remarked that the Binis were not afraid of death at all (Nyendael 1705: 447). Indeed, for them death did not exist neither in the materialistic and atheistic sense – as the definite and final end of life, nor in the Christian one – as transition to completely different afterlife and separation from all what was dear in earthly life. For the Binis, there was no afterworld and afterlife in this sense: death meant continuation of life in, in the nutshell, the same world, among the same people and spirits and with the prospect of rebirth in the aspect of an offspring to the human-being life which yet was regarded as the best (Talbot 1926: II, 268).

All this sounded axiomatically for the Binis because in their world outlook the universe embraced the domains of people, on the one hand, and ancestors' spirits and deities, on the other, as mutually necessary and interpenetrable. The picture of the universe turned out socio-, *i.e.*, Beninocentric. It departed from ideas about the place of their own country and society in it based on the premise that Benin was the universe's vitally important focal point, its center because it was held that just there precisely the Binis' deities and ancestors had created the universe, the Earth, and the life (see, *e.g.*, Ebohon 1972: 5; Eweka, E. B. 1992: 2–4; Isaacs, D, and E. Isaacs 1994: 7–9; Ugowe 1997: 1). And the whole universe concentrated in one point. That point was *eguae* – the sovereign's palace, the biggest building (or more precisely, architectural complex) in Benin City situated in her very center (see Roese *et al.* 2001). The erection of the palace on the present, central, spot was initiated by *Oba* Ewedo in the mid-13th century and symbolized the supreme rulers' eventual gaining independence of the *Uzama* in whose district of the city the first royal palace had been built (Melzian 1937: 43; Egharevba 1952: 23; 1956: 39; 1960: 10, 92; 1965: 19; Akenzua, E. 1965: 248; Beier 1966: 57; McClelland 1971: 11; Connah 1972: 35; 1975: 89–97; Obayemi 1976: 248; Roese 1984: 204; 1988: 68; Sargent 1986: 408; Eweka, E. B. 1989: IV; 1992: 28; Omoregie, O. S. B. 1992–1994: VI; Nevadomsky 1993: 72; Bondarenko 2001: 171–172).

In popular mass consciousness, sacrality of the *Oba* and the city as, in the final analysis, the center of the universe were interrelated directly (see, *e.g.* Sidahome 1964: 192–194). It is highly remarkable that in the society in which each and every animated and inanimate object was declared belonging to the sovereign, the only what was regarded as common property was his palace. From the time of *Oba* Ewuare, *i.e.*, from the mid-15th century (Ben-Amos 1980: 20), as the focal point of the whole universe's focal point (Benin City), the palace was seen as the hub of the whole cosmos in which communication between the living and the spirits, deities was to be performed most actively and effectively. Just for integrating the two parts of the society as it was seen by the Binis –visible and invisible but yet not at all less real and even more important, the main inhabitant of the palace, the *Oba*, existed in the Binis' minds first and foremost. Without this task's successful fulfilling by the *Oba*

the well-being of his subjects seemed impossible (see Bondarenko 1994a: 6–9; 1995a: 182–183, 203–231). Quite naturally in the view of the aforesaid, the main shrines of the majority of all-Benin cults, many of which introduced by *Oba*s Ewedo and Ewuare (see Melzian 1937: 57, 172; Meyerowitz 1940: 131; Ajisafe 1945: 43; Egharevba 1951b: 45; 1960: 11, 17, 20; 1969: 37; 1974: 10; Tong 1958: 108; Ayeni 1975: 42; Ben-Amos 1980: 20; Eweka, E. B. 1989: 21; 1992: 162–164; Curnow 1997: 47; Millar 1997: 23–26, 37), were situated in the *eguae* courtyard (see Roese and Bondarenko 2003: 23–32). The rites performed there were aimed directly at destination of that supergoal.[34] The explanation to why such cults must not but be observed given by a courtier of the sovereign of Dahomey to a European in the early 18th century, is completely applicable to Benin political culture: "Our kings cannot but make sacrifices to deities… Otherwise they would have been threatened by different calamities. The deities grant them victories for exact performance of the sacred… rite" (Prйvost 1783: 82–83).

In fact, the *Oba* himself was a "common property" of his subjects *sui generis*; he "belonged" to them as much as they "belonged" to him. Like the palace "situated" neither on the Earth nor in the heaven but on the critical spot of the universe's spheres' contiguity,[35] the sovereign, an offspring of a deity and an earthly woman, integrated human and superhuman in his person. Though people were sure that *Oba*s could turn into, for example, a bird or a leopard (Talbot 1926: II, 234; Rowlands 1993: 295–296), and the most outstanding of them were believed to be magicians (Talbot 1926: I, 154, II, 93, 96, 268, III, 962; Egharevba 1960: 14, 18, 32 *et al.*; Ben-Amos 1980: 23; Novikov 1990: 127; Owles 1991: 34; Akenzua, C. A. 1994–1997: I, 20–21; Eweka, I. 1998: 65–77), the sovereign was not a deity for the Binis but was seen by them as at one time "for and against, right and left, a human being and a deity; he integrates oppositions in himself, he exists for their integration" (Palau Marti 1964: 218). In the *Oba*, or to be sure, in his image, the Binis pacified the opposite sides of typical of archaic consciousness binary oppositions still detectable in their minds even in the mid-20th century, "… such as 'day' and 'night', 'bush' and 'village', 'growth' and 'control', under which a wider range of human experience can be ordered" (Bradbury 1973: 250; see also Bondarenko 1995a: 74–76).

The noted above recognition of both the sovereign's omnipotence and his obligation to share power with chiefs was a manifestation just of this feature in the political sphere. The Bini political culture rejected true autocracy at any level of socio-political hierarchy including the uppermost one. Keeping the balance of power in the political system was a categorical imperative for the precolonial African complex societies (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1987/1940b: 11–14; Diagne 1981: 40–55; Kochakova 1991b: 59–62). In Benin, notwithstanding the total recognition of the *Oba*'s omnipotence, the idea of principal political powers' balance was expressed in the formula as follows:

"No council (of titled chiefs. – *D. B.*) and its decision is valid and authoritative without the knowledge and approval of the *Oba* and the *Oba* may not enact or authorise any law and order in spite of the chiefs" (Ajisafe 1945: 17). The Binis' perception of, and attitude to their supreme ruler were typical of archaic cultures as well: as Braginskaya (1982: 614) generalizes, in such cultures "the king is conceived as the center of the universe, the axe of the world; the cosmic and the social are fused in him indiscernibly. In the general mythological concept of cyclic change of death and rebirth the king personifies the pole of life and victory over destruction of both the cosmos and human collectivity".

Indeed, those were not two different worlds like Christian Paradise and Hell[36] – this was one world fastened by power, its institutions and holders; each on the respective level. In fact, for the Binis they existed precisely for the sake of integrating the universe (see Bondarenko 1995a: 24–89, 182–183; 1997b; 2000a: 192). This is why power, both the substance and its manifestation in political institutions including that of the supreme ruler first and foremost, was surrounded with a halo of sacrality. As Skalnнk (1991: 145) resumes, "[s]acralization of the ruler … simplifies significantly the process of different social segments' integration into one system with central administration. The king is the symbol of such integrity". As has been argued above, precisely for the sake of its realization, that is of setting and maintaining of relations between the living and the ancestors, deities on the highest level for the benefit of subject, the very institution of the supreme ruler just existed in the Binis' outlook. Sociocentrism of world outlook is a fundamental precondition and term *sine qua non* of true sacralization of power: autonomization of human personality and general anthropocentrization of Weltanschauung put an end to it (Weinberg 1990: 95–96).

Weber (1990/1920: 317–318) was definitely wrong postulating that in polytheistic cultures people are indifferent to their societies' political order: in Benin after the end of the turbulent period of political experiments ended by consolidation of the Second dynasty the monarchy was firmly perceived as the only acceptable form of political regime. This institution, the *Oba*s dynasty, lineage became an integral part of the Binis' system of values just because of correspondence to the ideas of necessity to maintain the universe's stability and of the ways this could be achieved. It is not by chance that after interregnums the same dynasty, though sometimes another branch of it, remained in power. The royal ancestors (from the time of the first *Oba*, Eweka I [Eweka, E. B. 1992: 163]), the ruling *Oba*, and (from the 16th century) the Queen Mother were among the major all-Benin objects of worship, the cults of the royal ancestors being most important (Melzian 1955: 89). In particular, from the time of Ewuare, *ugie erha oba*, the festival dedicated to the royal ancestors had become the main holiday in the country. The *Oba*'s ancestors were conceived as those of all the Bini in the same way as ancestors of the heads of the extended

families, communities, and chiefdoms were at the respective socio-political levels. Characteristically, the altars dedicated to the royal ancestors reproduced the village altars being of course, much richer decorated and more impressive (Talbot 1926: III, 887; Akpata, A. 1938: 7; Fagg 1970: 16–17) as it was evident for the Binis that might and sacrality an *Oba*'s altar contained was greater than, and supreme in relation to the common altars. In the meantime, the procedure of a deceased's elevation to the rank of an ancestor was the same both for an *Oba* and a commoner (Akpata, A. 1938: 7).

These cults formed the core of what today is called "official ideology" and, as well as stressing of the *Oba*'s close relations to many important deities and other supernatural forces in numerous sovereign's titles (Palau Marti 1964: 92), in myths, arts and so on (see Bondarenko 2001: 199–200), served as hardly not the main channel for penetration into, and consolidation of the idea of all-Benin unity and integrity in the common Binis' minds. The dynasty was attributed with not only world-preserving but also world-arranging role: just due to its activities after the epoch of social chaos (struggle of multiple chiefdoms and protocity centers with each other) the social being was brought to conformity with the due by setting effective all-Benin authority (Egharevba 1956: 2–3, 38–39; 1960: 1–6; 1965: 12–18; 1970; see further Bondarenko 2001: 139–167; 2003a; Bondarenko and Roese 2004). The merit in setting of, as well as the responsibility for maintenance of the balance in society and hence in the Beninocentric universe at the most general and important uppermost level was entrusted to *Oba*s. The main rituals of the *Oba* and his ancestors' cults were performed by the sovereign himself. He also played the central part in some other important rites (particularly, of the agrarian cycle) the aim of which was to provide the people's well-being by means of supporting the integrity of the worlds of humans and deities, spirits on the highest level. So, the sacral ruler naturally was the supreme priest, too.

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 in official ideology 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 BC (Baum 2004). Characteristically, this transition also resulted in separation of power from the populace with respect to the world-view system, as at the family and community levels the ancestor cult continued to determine and regulate life of the Chinese as late as in the first decades of the 20th century (Hsu 1948).


**4. Benin reality: homoarchic supercomplexity without bureaucracy**
Resuming the analysis provided in the present chapter, I feel quite safe to argue

that Benin was politically centralized (in any of the senses accepted in the literature – see chapter 2, section 1) but her administrative system was not specialized. By the end of the *Ogiso* period the further prolongation of the situation when chiefdoms (and autonomous communities) bore the suprachiefdom authority while *Ogiso*s governed by practically the chiefdom methods became impossible. The interregnum of the second half of the 12$^{th}$ century resulted not only in the Second (*Oba*s) dynasty's coming to power but also in significant "reconfiguration" of the Binis' socio-political order. That reconfiguration was determined by the fact that contrary to the First dynasty, under the Second dynasty of the 13$^{th}$ – 19$^{th}$ centuries true supremacy of the central political institutions over the society and its socio-political componenets was established, *i.e.*, the domination of the former over the latter eventually became effective. Supplemented by economic growth, the socio-political (and accompanying ideological) reconfiguration made possible the small Benin Kingdom's transformation into an empire, a regional superpower which heydays were the late 15$^{th}$ – 16$^{th}$ centuries while decay lasted for the next three centuries. The socio-political whole personified in the central authority, the Benin society, from the 13$^{th}$ century on was also, figuratively speaking, not equal to a simple sum of its parts (chiefdoms and autonomous communities) but now had a higher quality of its own. This new quality ensured lack of a real threat of disintegration of Benin as a socio-political unit or of another change of dynasty, at least due to internal reasons. Allegiance to the supreme ruler became more important than that to the native chiefdom or community. Heads of chiefdoms and autonomous communities were now really subordinated to the supreme authority and had to occupy a "fitting" place within the governmental hierarchy. The all-Benin administrative apparatus created under the new dynasty was not an amorphous conglomeration of leaders of socio-political units of the complex society as it was under *Ogiso*s. In fact, due to that socio-political reconfiguration (pillared ideologically) the truly integrated Benin appeared, both as society and polity. With the establishment of effective supracommunity and suprachiefdom authority the historical search of the most appropriate for the Binis forms of social and political organization on all the levels of their being was finally over. Benin found the sociopolitical "frames" in which all the changes of subsequent centuries prior to the violent interruption of her independent existence by the British in 1897 took place; the frames that promoted a small kingdom's transformation into "Great Benin", as the country used to be called by Europeans.[37]

However, in the essentially communal Benin society even those who governed it on the top level were not professional administrators – "bureaucrats". Thus, in accordance with the almost generally accepted idea of intimate connection between the state and bureaucracy, Benin cannot and should not be considered as a state. In the meantime, by the 13$^{th}$ century Benin had historically passed and culturally no doubt superseded the complex

chiefdom at the level of which it was in the $10^{th} - 12^{th}$ centuries though such traits of the preceding period as, *e.g.*, ethnic heterogeneity and non-participation of the suprasimple-chiefdom elite in subsistence production, social stratification were inherited and strengthened further (see Bondarenko 1993a; 1995a: 90–275; 2000b: 106–112; 2001: 232–243; 2004a: 344–348). At the same number of complexity levels (two above the local community), socio-economic background (extended-family-based community and slash-and-burn hoe agriculture), and till the mid-15$^{th}$ century approximately the same size of territory – about 4,500 – 5,000 sq km (Bondarenko 2001: 123–124, 241), Benin of the *Oba*s demonstrated incomparably higher degree of integration, unity, and centralization. From this standpoint Benin can be characterized as not just complex but as a supercomplex society. In her social complexity level, economic parameters, governmental apparatus' hierarchization, 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 that consisted of extended families (see below, section 4 of chapter 4).

In complex and supercomplex societies communities are not internally homogeneous but rather comprise a number of factions that co-operate and compete with each other in the socio-political sphere and whose role increases with the formalization of the supracommunity levels of complexity (Hays 1993; Brumfiel and Fox 1994; Stone 2005). The Benin community was characterized by a tangle of kin and neighbor ties dominated by kinship (see chapter 4, section 4) and by explicit social and administrative homoarchy expressed particularly in unreserved superiority of the seniors over the juniors in any social interaction in the family and (as an outcome of this [Sidahome 1964: 128]) the community and chiefdom (Egharevba 1949: 67–70; Bradbury 1957: 16, 23–25; 1973: 149–209; Roese and Rees 1994: 543–545; Bondarenko 2001: 39–55). Margaret Mead (1970) argued logically that a "postfigurative" (stability-oriented) culture depends crucially on the real presence in society of three generations' representatives. In Biniland the three male age-grade system – *otu* (see Thomas, N. W. 1910a: I, 11–12; Talbot 1926: III, 545–549; Bradbury 1957: 15, 32, 34, 49–50; 1969; 1973: 170–175; Igbafe 1979: 13–15; Agheyisi 1986: 22, 39–40, 66, 67, 74; Bondarenko 1995a: 144–149; 2001: 48–51), was a proper means for permanent reproduction of the homoarchic *status quo*, at one time equally effectively promoting the senior men's privileges and preventing autocracy in the community (as a whole well-defined group of persons – senior male age-grade members had the equal right and duty to participate in its government). Even in the second half of the 20$^{th}$ century the age-grade system, though partially corrupted in the colonial time (see Bondarenko 1995a: 292, note 19), was of greater importance for the Binis than for any of their neighbors (Kochakova *et al.* 1974: 79). Not occasionally Robert Bradbury (1957: 15; see also 1969) put the system of three age-grades

on the list of "major characteristic features of the Edo-speaking peoples."
Through the age-grade system the intergenerational transmission of culture in
the broadest meaning of the notion was carried out; the traditional social norms
reflected in myths and legends first and foremost (Uwechue 1970: 146). Lack
of doubt in fairness of the sanctified by tradition socio-political norms and
relations, and of consciousness in observing them is the most fundamental
pledge of the archaic cultures' vitality (Mead 1970).

  The male dominance in the Bini community was related to the fact
that men had the age-grade system whereas women did not have it (Bradbury
1957: 32, note 14; 1973: 182). Clearly, this was an outcome of the situation
typical of patrilineal cultures when "women have their hearth as the rear
[while] men have the community hearth... Her own home, the hearth as a part
of the community... is the background of the woman's social functioning...
[whereas] [t]he community as a whole is the background of the man's social
functioning..." (Girenko 1991: 154; see also Ksenofontova 1990: 51). In life
of the family the Bini women played a well noticeable part but at the
community level they were overshadowed by men almost completely and the
degree of their involvement in the all-community affairs was generally
insignificant (Mercier 1962: 289–292).

  Hence, in practice only men operated at the level of the suprafamily
level of the collectivity's being – just the one at which the age-grade system
existed. Only those incorporated into it could become possessors of the
esoteric knowledge: the community's myths, history of the ancestors, rules of
communication with them and deities for the whole collectivity's benefit.
However, men also got this knowledge not at once but in the course of their
lifes, as they were approaching the ancestors. The whole amount of such
information became accessible to them only with transition to the senior age-
grade what was underlined particularly by the co-incidence of that grade's and
ancestors' names: in the Edo language *edion* means both *ancestors* and
*elders*.[38] Thus, the age-grades institution sanctioned the system of government
in the community based on typical of it perceiving of any social relations as
those between not individuals but collectivities, in this case – on the idea of
proximity of a group of men to a group of male ancestors. The immense
prestige of old men in general was based on the same premise (Dennett 1910:
82; Uwechue 1970: 145; Bradbury 1973: 157, 172, 243–244, 249–250;
Eweka, I. 1998: 157).

  So, the three age grades – "[e]*roghae*, *eghele* and *edion* represent, for
the Edo, the three natural stages of life through which every man, as a useful
member of the community, should pass" (Bradbury 1973: 172). Each age-
grade carried out definite tasks, its members shared common duties, distinctive
from those of the other two grades. The senior age-grade members, just called
*edion* – "the elders" were released from physical work, and their main
obligation was to exercise power and support proper relations with the

ancestors' spirits. Thus, the principle of gerontocracy dominated in administration at the community and, even more so, the extended-family levels (Bradbury 1969; Sargent 1986; Kochakova 1991a). The ancestor cult fixed the position of every person in the universe and in the Benin society as its most important part, so the seniors' power was rooted in, and rested upon the natural (under such circumstances) 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.

In fact, the seniors were the guarantors of traditions' (realized as the ancestors' behests) punctual observance (Uwechue 1970: 145; Bradbury 1973: 171–172), what was considered the most fundamental condition of proper managing resulting in prosperity of the whole collectivity (Bondarenko 1995a: 81–89). Natural contradictions between the age-grades were sublimated in the ritual sphere (Bradbury 1973: 184–185, 244). Absolute legitimacy for the Binis of the institutions based on the division by age and sex played an exceptionally significant part in support of peace and tranquility, generally typical of the community (for detail, see Bondarenko 1995a: 176–180). "Observance of the principle of seniority guarantees obeying to the power, ensures respect to the custom and tradition. In a traditional society respect to the seniors' power and, wider, the knack of obeying are implanted from early childhood by the system of upbringing and norms of behavior" (Kochakova 1991a: 19).

The *edion* only,[39] including heads and representatives without fail of all the extended families the given community comprised (Egharevba 1949: 13–14; Bradbury 1957: 29, 1973: 156)[40], formed the community (village) council (Bradbury 1957: 16, 56; 1973: 243–244; Eweka, E. B. 1992: 83), thus having legal power over all the community members. That well-organized council of elders appointed and invested the head of the senior age-grade, a first-settlers' male offspring with proved qualities of charismatic leader, to be *odionwere* – the council "chairman" and the whole community's leader who had the right of decisive voice in the council at discussion of any matter and represented his community in relations with the supracommunity administrative bodies and other communities (Bradbury 1957: 32–34; 1973: 172, 176–180, 243; Dapper 1671: 492; Egharevba 1949: 11; Sidahome 1964: 127; Uwechue 1970: 145). From the start the head of a Bini community was not merely the ritual leader. As on the whole intracommunity relations were similar to the intrafamily ones but they were realized at a higher level, the duties which the head of a community performed were naturally the same as those of an extended family head. As well as the latter but on his own level, the head of a community distributed land, adopted strangers into the community, guarded and, if necessary interpreted traditions, administered justice, etc. (Bradbury 1957: 32-33; 1973: 176-179).

However, the major reason for the very existence of the institution of

*odionwere* in people's minds reflected in the principles of his appointment, defined the ritual function of supreme mediator between the living and the ancestors as the most important among the *odionwere*'s duties. Besides this, the worship of deities and ancestors on behalf of the populace strengthened further the position of this dignitary. The *odionwere* received gifts from those governed by him but those gifts were actually completely of the prestigious and ritual sort (Talbot 1926: III, 914): economically he depended on his own family whose plot was not bigger than that of any other family. As any of all the eligible community's male members was to take the *odionwere* office, he could represent easily not the family of his predecessor: there were no privileged families in the primordial Bini community – all the families were reputed to be founded by first-settlers on the community's land were treated as equal to each other.

The oral tradition offers its own version of the *odionwere* title's appearance. According to it, in the predynastic time "… the Government of the country was directed by different leaders in each quarter by turns or rotationally" (Egharevba 1965: 12). Among them there as if were Odion and Owere who united their authority under the common title of *odionwere*.

> Each of the two leaders Odion and Owere lived for many years and attained a great age. Their times and administration were very good and peaceful and successful throughout.
> They were equally loved, admired, honoured and respected by all to the end of their days. Thus the names Odion and Owere became the hereditary official rank Odion-Owere or Odionwere – "head" in our Land ever since to the present day. Hence the Odionwere was being made by old age in every quarter of the City and villages in the Benin Division in those days (*Ibid.*; see also *Idem* 1952: 26).

It seems that the oral tradition's relation reflects the collectivistic nature of the Bini ancient system of government but by no means the real, historical, course of events. It cannot reflect it already because there was no Benin as an integrated socio-political unit in those days at all: local communities were independent of each other and each of them was in fact a separate society. In reality the authority and the very title of *odionwere* definitely grew out of the age-grade institution (for detail see Bondarenko and Roese 1998: 369; Bondarenko 2001: 51–55).

The community council met on the initiative of either the head of the community or the council of an extended family (Sidahome 1964: 114) and took a real and active part in the management, discussing and solving the whole range of community's typical problems: those connected with land distribution and use, legal proceedings and so on and so forth (Egharevba 1949: 11;

Bradbury 1957: 33–34; 1973: 171–172, 179–180, 243; Sidahome 1964: 127; Uwechue 1970: 145). The intracommunity relations were similar to intrafamily ones but were realized on a higher level. Particularly, analogous extended-family councils operated at the lower level of complexity (Egharevba 1949: 11; Sidahome 1964: 100, 158, 164; see below).

As for the people's assembly, it had already no doubt lost any significance and degraded as an institution at least by the time of the first contacts between the Binis and the Europeans in late 15th – 16th centuries, if not much earlier – by the first *Oba*'s time (Bondarenko 1995a: 170; Bondarenko and Roese 1998: 369). Some reminiscences of its former existence might be seen in the council members' right to apply to wide circles of communalists for consultations and maybe in rare "deaf" hints of the oral tradition (Egharevba 1965: 15). The existence of the public assembly is ethnographically fixed among socio-politically less developed ethnic groups of Southern Nigeria including some Bini and kindred to them (Talbot 1926: III, 565), what can also be considered as an indirect proof of its presence in early Benin.

Although the primordial Bini community did not know inequality among its constituent families in access to power, though the same person – *odionwere* was responsible for the performance of both profane and ritual duties at the community level, and these features have remained characteristic of many local communities up to now, communities of another type, with privileged families and two heads, have existed either from the mid-1st millennium AD, *i.e.*, from the predynastic time (Bondarenko 2001: 56–60). Under the Benin conditions, privileges of a family could consist only in the right to nominate its member to the office of the community head every time it was vacant (in particular, such a family was not distinguished significantly out of common families by its living standard [Bradbury 1973: 177–178][41]). Thus, the problem of intracommunity relations along the line "individual (the community head) – collectivity (the community)" turned out identical to the "collectivity (the privileged extended family) – collectivity (the other families of the community)" line. By no means did the *onogie* and his family lose touch with their community fellows: "The common interest and sympathy expected of all members of the community in respect of the misfortune of one of its members finds its fullest expression in their attitude to the *onogie*" (*Ibid.*: 183).

Every Bini village had an *odionwere* but far from all of them had another head titled *onogie* (*Idem.* 1957: 33; 1973: 176). When separation of powers in a community between the two heads was the case, the *odionwere* acted predominantly as the sacral "master of land", the performer of rituals of the ancestor cult while almost all the profane duties rested with the *onogie*. The definition of the *odionwere* and the *onogie* offices as ritual and profane respectively is to some extend conditional for the former could preserve some non-ritual duties. However, such duties could not be the most important, essential for him, contrary to the *onogie* who was concentrated primarily on

profane responsibilities. Not by chance "[i]n villages without *enigie* (pl. of *onogie*. – *D. B.*) meetings of the village council take place either at the house of the *odionwere* or in a special meeting-house, *ogwedio*, which (what is remarkable in view of the *odionwere*'s principal predestination. – *D. B.*) contains the shrine of the collective dead (*edio*) of the village," whereas "[i]n villages with a hereditary headman meetings are convened at his house" (Bradbury 1957: 34). Thus sometimes the *odionwere*'s and *onogie*'s spheres of activities could overlap and the actual division of authority in a concrete village partially depended on relative strength of its two rulers (Bradbury 1957: 33, 65, 73–74).

It must be pointed out that the mental aims of the Binis by no means blocked social differentiation in a community and the whole society hindering only from their disintegration, that is violation of social and cosmic stability. In a sense, the Bini mentality even demanded the community's internal differentiation on these or those foundations because any integrity was seen by the Binis as not homogeneous but structured (Bondarenko 1995a: 24–89; 1997b); for example, this reflected in the division of ancestors into the ranks of "fathers", "elders", and "chiefs" (Bradbury 1973: 231–233).

Two heads existed only in the communities composed of a privileged and all the rest, unprivileged extended families (Thomas, N. W 1910a: 12; Egharevba 1956: 6). The *onogie* has always been a representative of the privileged family (thus his office was hereditary) whereas the *odionwere*, an *edion* member, could originate from any first-settlers' family. Within the privileged extended family the principles of succession to the office of the profane community head were identical to those basically applied at the family level. As a rule the eldest son of the deceased *onogie* inherited the office. If a community head died without leaving sons after him, his place was taken by his eldest brother. If the son of the deceased community head was still a child, the brother became the regent (*edayi*). Finally, in the case when neither sons nor brothers left, another male relative inherited the office; at this point legal traditions differed from one community to another (Bradbury 1973: 164–165). The appearance of communities with separation of powers between the *onogie* and *odionwere* was tightly related to the process of chiefdom formation in Biniland in the mid- – late 1st millennium AD (Obayemi 1976: 256; Bondarenko and Roese 1998; Bondarenko 1999; 2001: 55–71; see also section 3 of the next chapter).

At the same time, the absence of autocracy and clear presence of some heterarchic features should not be confused with democracy and presuppose improbability of homoarchy. For example, when Pirzio-Biroli (2001/1978: 52) argues that "[c]ontrary to the ancient Roman family, the African family is a democratic unit: in many respects the patriarch acts as a representative of the family council basing on a certain consensus achieved at its session", he actually means just lack of autocracy. However, the extended family (which in

Benin served as the matrix for the upper levels of social complexity) was not democratic, at least as far as the members of its council – all the nuclear families heads were not elected or, most often, even selected from a number of candidates but were recognized "in a natural way", just the same as they became the heads of their small families.

At the inheritance of the office of the extended family head (*odafen noyanwa* or *odionmwan*) a certain division of power between the eldest brother and the eldest son of a deceased took place. This controversy could arise out of ambivalence of the brothers' position: they were not only brothers of the new ancestor but, like he, also sons of another ancestor – their common father. In the result, a brother acquired power over the deceased's siblings (though more correctly, he was to get it, as in reality that did not go without saying [Bradbury 1973: 278–279]) while a son started exercising power over his descendants.[42] But in any case, the major determinant of the high status, the right and obligation to perform the rites of the new ancestors' worship, remained with the deceased's eldest son who either had already been promoted to the *odion* age-grade or actually joined it due to his new position in the family (Sharevskaja 1957: 204; Bradbury 1957: 54–55; 1973: 233–238; Forman, W. *et al.* 1960: 14). Thus, he became the principal person responsible for guaranteeing the internal integrity of the lineage, as far as just the ancestor cult made a lineage such and sanctioned its existence. The new status, rights, and duties were being acquired by the son gradually, in the course of his thorough and diligent performance of a long-lasting series of burial, funeral, and mourning rites (Thomas, N. W. 1920; Ajisafe 1945: 49; Bradbury 1965: 99; Uwaifo 1965; Roese 1992a). So, in general, in Benin the rule of inheritance by son did not stabilize (remind at this point the controversies in the royal family – see above, in section 2 of this chapter). As a matter of fact, the question was in recognition of a junior in age (a son) as the one closer to the family's ancestors than a senior in age person – a deceased's brother. In social respect this would have led to strengthening of nuclear-family ties at the expense of the ties in the extended family what would have been at variance with the general socio-cultural atmosphere in the Bini society.

The head of the extended family (*odafen noianwa*), and hence its council "chairman" and "spokesman" was recognized as the closest to the family's patrilineal ancestors and thus potentially the best mediator between them and their living offspring (Egharevba 1949: 13–14; Bradbury 1957: 29, 54–56; 1973: 155–157, 160–164, 230–250; Sidahome 1964: 114). The *odafen noianwa* was considered and respected as the father of all the members of his extended family (Bradbury 1957: 54–56; 1973: 156, 157, 160–164, 230–250). He performed all the duties, including punitive (Thomas, N. W. 1910a: I, 121), the performance of which was necessary for the preservation of the collective stable being under the conditions of the ideology of gifts-and-services-exchange dominance. First of all, the *odafen noianwa* was responsible for the

continuous establishing and maintaining of good relations with ancestors – donators of the crop (just that is why he was the chief performer of their cult rituals), and for managing the agricultural works in the scale of the extended family as a whole. He also was the judge and considered cases that did not overstep the limits of his extended family by their significance and the range of persons involved into them. Nobody else but the *odafen noianwa*, as the community council member represented the family on the community level in any case, even when a matter concerned only one of its nuclear families (Egharevba 1949: 13–14; Bradbury 1957: 29; 1973: 156; Forman, W. *et al.* 1960: 14). Thus, notwithstanding the existence of the family council, evidently formed automatically of nuclear families heads (Sidahome 1964: 114), on the extended family level the supreme duties of both the profane and sacral kind were always performed by the same person. In return for all the household people's service to him, he bore "the moral obligation of taking care of their material and spiritual well-being" (Bradbury 1973: 155).

In the extended family of the Binis a clear trend toward junior (socially and in age) members' oppression could well be observed. Wives were considered and often treated as their husbands' servants,[43] children – as those of fathers, younger brothers – of elder brothers, younger women – as servants of senior women above all, and so on (Ajisafe 1945: 10; Egharevba 1949: 11–15, 101, 110; Bradbury 1957: 29; 1973: 155; Sidahome 1964: 143; Kalous 1970: 87–88; Loth 1988: 228–229; Omorodion and Myers 1989). However, true autocracy is basically impossible when all social relations are built up primarily as those among collectivities, not individuals and when collectivism is typical of the given culture's "modal personality" (see Bondarenko 1995a). The homoarchic principle by which the old are always superior to the young (and men are superior to women within the same age category) remained unchangeable at the societal level, though an individual could raise his status in the family and community in the course of life by growing older and proving personal good nature, intellectual abilities and so forth (see, *e.g.*, Ajisafe 1945: 10; Egharevba 1949: 11–15, 101, 110; Bradbury 1957: 29; 1973: 155; Sidahome 1964: 143; Kalous 1970: 87–88; Loth 1988: 228–229; Omorodion and Myers 1989; Eweka, I. 1998: 14, 162). The status of a senior relative could not be granted by birth or *honoris causa* whereas that of junior was not ascribed forever. (On age and sex as basically social not to a smaller degree than physiological categories in Benin, and on this fact's vivid manifestations in the Benin society, politics, economy, spiritual culture, see in detail Bondarenko 2001: 39–54, 238).

At absence of bureaucracy with its encompassing pressure, the community remained the socio-cultural focus of the Benin society, and the fact that it consisted of polygamous extended families was of fundamental importance (see chapter 4, section 4 and chapter 5, section 1). The community relations were an extension of family (see Bondarenko 1995a: 134–138; 2001:

44–45), and owe to this the essentially homoarchic social structure and non-democratic value system, determined by the dominance of kinship ties with the division into the elder as superior to the younger, men as superior to women as the primary and most crucial, were characteristic in Biniland of the community as well as of the family.

# IV

# Was Benin a Suprakin Based Society?

**1. Anthropological theory: kin *vs.* territory, biological *vs.* social**
By mentioning with respect to Benin the community matrix, the kin character of central for the society religious beliefs (and at the same time ideology) – the ancestor cult, etc. we come to one more aspect of the problem of the state which is, consciously or not, often evicted from many contemporary definitions due to the wide-spread approach to the state as merely a specific set of political institutions[44] (as well as to cultures in comparison with which the state is defined; *e.g.*, Timothy 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 state society.

It is important even more so because of its high relevance for this work's most general theoretical scope: I presume that homoarchic and heterarchic societies (at least preindustrial) typically differ in the correlation of kin and territorial lines in their organization (*e.g.*, Bondarenko 2000c: 215; 2001: 256–257; 2004b: 47–48). It can further be suggested that this distinction is in its turn connected with the type of the community, the universal substratum social institution, which is dominant. The extended-family community in which dominant vertical social ties are vividly expressed, being given the shape of kinship relations with the division of relatives into elder and younger as most important, is more peculiar to homoarchic societies. And generally characteristic of heterarchic societies is the territorial community in which dominant social ties are horizontal and apprehended in the first place as neighborhood ties among those equal in rights. I will elaborate on this point in some detail in the closing chapter.

The "kin *vs.* territory" problem is intrinsically related to that of correlation of biological and social in the phenomenon of kinship. Morgan (1877) contrasted the kin-based society (*societas*) to territory-based (*civitas*) as the one underpinned by primordial "natural" ties to the one formed by, in this sense, artificial ties. Thus, he recognized kinship as a direct projection of real biological relations on the social sphere. However, in the 20th century several generations of anthropologists, contrary to Morgan, recognized kinship as having social substance independent of biological and, even more so, as a social phenomenon *par excellence* (see, *e.g.*, Lowie 1948; Lĭvi-Strauss 1949;

Murdock 1949; Bohannan and Middleton 1968; Needham 1971; Goody 1973; Keesing 1975). As it was formulated by Robert Lowie (1948: 57), "… biological relationships merely serve as a starting point for the development of sociological conceptions of kinship". After the period of the late 1960s – early 1970s when many leading anthropologists declared that there really was no such thing as kinship at all (see Barnes 2006), the wave of theoretical thought in cultural anthropology seems to have been rolling backwards, in the direction of recognition of the phenomenon of kinship accompanied by "rehabilitation" of its biological background, slowly from the mid-1980s (Schneider 1984) and more and more rapidly nowadays (*vide stricto* Carsten 2004). In this respect the contribution to the theory made by evolutionary biology (sociobiology) from the first steps of the discipline in the mid-1960s (Hamilton 1964) on can hardly be overestimated. In particular, the scientists working within this paradigm have shown the primordially biological nature of kin altruism and favoring, as well as of many other events related to the problem of kinship and its nature (*e.g.*, Chagnon and Irons 1979: 79–249). The general view of sociobiologists on this problem may be represented correctly by the conclusion drawn by Birgit Stụbich (2002: 51): "The stronger theory is the kin altruism, cultural influence cannot be that strong." That is, in the phenomenon of kinship biologically (genetically) predetermined features of individual behavior dominate socially imposed norms.

Nevertheless, manifestations of kin altruism, favoring and so forth are important social facts, too. As everyone lives in a society, all the personal relations are objectified in it and by it. Actually, in this sense in a society nothing properly completely individual, personal can ever be found. The same way no relation between people can be purely biological: when relatives live together, each of them commits social acts every moment – the acts that if not involve or touch the rest of the association members directly, in any case give them reasons to add something to their evaluation of that person while the latter has to take their expectations of his behavior into account. One might say that biological kinship preexisted the human society, as far as without biological relations between individuals the very appearance of *Homo sapiens* of course could not become possible. However, as it is stressed by sociobiologists, the ties, truly social by nature, integrate non-human primate associations (Butovskaya and Fajnberg 1993: 129–148), and hence there are no reasons to discredit the arguments that biological and social in the phenomenon of kinship went hand in hand in associations of the humans' direct ancestors either and that social objectification of biological relations is also older than the human species.

What is especially significant with respect to the human society, is that kinship relations in it are not just objectified but also categorized and transformed what results in lack of convergence between biological and social kinship. In archaic societies social categorization as such takes the shape of all-

embracing kinship terminology (and the remnants of it can be observed in modern cultures, for instance, when one says about a close friend that they are "like brothers" or "like sisters") as a means of social relations' comprehension and legitimization. In particular, a society can recognize biologically non-relatives as such (for example, in cases of fictive parenthood or brotherhood), the biological degree of a relative's proximity to an *ego* can be "corrupted" due to social norms (in cultures with classificatory systems of kinship within which, for instance, no distinction between siblings and cousins, parents and aunts, uncles can be made), or biological kinship can be socially ignored (in particular, matrilineal relatives in patrilineal cultures and patrilineal relatives in matrilineal).

All in all, I regard the aforesaid as vivid and clear indications of the fact that, although biological ties never lose their importance, in society this importance acquires social essence; even the function of population reproduction is not an exception. In the final analysis, kinship is a biology-related social event, like absolutely all the phenomena that exist in social milieu and hence are inevitably objectified, categorized, and transformed by it. In fact, one can feel it even in our own society with its Eskimo (Murdock 1949) terminology of kinship which seems to bring biological kinship to conformity with social: for example, do not we recognize as parents and expect fulfillment of all the respective duties from a couple that has adopted an "other's" child from an orphanage?

In situations when the decrease in kinship relations' role of social bandage becomes the case, people have to rely mainly on their personal abilities and opportunities, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to broaden the sphere of social ties treating other people of the same social status within the wider society as their equals. All this leads to individualization and rationalization of not social relations only, but of the human mentality, culture as well (Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000b: 307–308). Besides, this also leads to the appearance of legal systems which presuppose equal justice under law for all the citizens (Dozhdev 1990; 1993: 170–179). For example, it does not seem to be a mere coincidence that in ancient Rome the development of the democratic *civitas* was accompanied by loosening of kinship ties (Dozhdev 2004/2000), or that egalitarization of the North-East Yemeni communities in the Middle Ages went hand in hand with disintegration of the kin mutual assistance and transition from the clan to individual landholding (Korotayev 2000). The latter case acquires especial instructiveness in comparison with, *e.g.*, the highlanders of North Africa – the Berbers who live in rather similar environment but are characterized by much stronger kinship ties and much less egalitarian socio-political organization (Bobrovnikov 2000).[45]

At dawn of the 20th century Heinrich Schurtz (1902) and ultimately as far back as in the middle of the last century British structuralists and American Boasians demonstrated that Morgan (as well as Maine [1861; 1875] before and

Engels [1985/1884][46] after him) had postulated the opposition between kinship and territoriality too rigidly, even if the social dimension of the former phenomenon is acknowledged (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 198 ff.; 1951; Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1987/1940a: XIV–XX, 6–7, 10–11; Lowie 1927; 1948: 10–12, 317–318; Brown 1951; Schapera 1956; Kaberry 1957; Middleton and Tait 1958: 5; Mair 1970/1962: 11–16; 1965: 99–100; see also Balandier 1967: Ch. 3; McGlynn and Tuden 1991b: 5–10; Bargatzky 1993: 267–269). These mid-20th century anthropologists provided conclusive arguments for importance of territorial ties in primitive (non-state) cultures. As a result, already in 1965 Lewis (1965: 96) 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 the segmentary lineage societies as to other types of society". The fact of the territorial ties' importance in stateless societies had become so evident that even Soviet scholars raised in the lap of ideologically biased dogmatic Morgan – Engels's teaching, could not but acknowledge it in the mid-1970s and 80s (Kudryavtsev 1977: 121; Popov 1982: 71; Pershits 1986b: 179; Kubbel 1988: 114–123). Recent criticisms on contemporary evolutionists – neoevolutionists' attempts to look at the growth of complexity (including state formation) process in light of an unflinching move from kinship to territory, see in McIntosh 1999c; Vansina 1999.

On the other hand, historians and anthropologists have also shown that typologically non- and originally prestate institutions of kinship could remain important in state societies including medieval European (*e.g.*, Bloch 1961/1939–1940: 141 ff.; Lewis 1965: 99–101; 1999: 47–48; Genicot 1968; Duby 1970; Claessen 1978: 589; Claessen and Skalnнk 1978b: 641; 1978c: 22; Korotayev and Obolonkov 1989; Tainter 1990: 29–30). Susan Reynolds even complained in 1990 of that though "all that we know of medieval [Western European] society leaves no doubt of the importance of kinship … we (medievalists. – *D. B.*) have in the past tended to stress kinship at the expense of other bonds" (1990: 4). 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 to gradual substitution of kin-based institutions by territory-based ones at supralocal levels of socio-cultural and political complexity. In fact, Morton Fried (1970/1960: 692–693) was very accurate indeed postulating that the state is organized on not a non-kin but "suprakin" basis.

## 2. Kinship, territoriality, and the phenomenon of the state

Taking the aforesaid into account, I nevertheless believe that the "kinship – territoriality" criterion as such still deserves attention. It may be especially significant for Africanists as far as interaction between the two phenomena on the continent was (and actually still is) intricate: it is generally recognized that

territorial ties turned out hardly able to overcome decisively "the resistance of kinship" in the majority of even most complex precolonial societies (Mair 1970/1962: 234–247; Balandier 1967: 61–65, 95, 99; Kubbel 1970: 10; 1987: 6; Pirzio-Biroli 2001/1978: 237–238, 249–253, 261).

The problem of appearance of the state as a territory-based unit is complicated crucially by an important circumstance: on the one hand, the early state is invariably homoarchic (Claessen and Skalnнk 1978b: 640; also see below – chapter 5, section 4) while, on the other hand, non-state homoarchic societies are characterized just by a greater role of kinship ties in comparison with the role these ties play in heterarchic societies of the same overall complexity levels (see Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000b: 306–308). This regularity is observable already among non-human primates whose associations "with more despotic dominant style of relations are more kin-oriented" (Butovskaya 2000: 48). A comparison of heterarchic and homoarchic societies of primitive hunter-gatherers (*e.g.*, the San and the Australian Aborigines) demonstrates the same (Artemova 2000a). This pattern persists in much more complex cultures as well (see Bondarenko 1997c: 13–14; 1998b: 98; 1998d: 198–199; 2000c; 2004b; Bondarenko and Korotayev 1998; 1999; 2000c), including many contemporary Second and Third World cultures (Bondarenko and Korotayev 2004). Within them the connection between kin orientation and homoarchic socio-political organization is much more sophisticated, the kin orientation being normally institutionalized and sanctioned by conspicuous bodies of cultural norms, myths, beliefs and traditions, which in their turn influence significantly the processes of socio-political transformation. So, strong kin orientation serves as a precondition for socio-cultural and political homoarchization necessary for early state formation, and as an obstacle on the way to state as a predominantly non-kin based unit, at one and the same time.

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 is adequate (on the discussion on the interrelation between the phenomena of state and society, see Vliet 2005: 122–123). The society is normally a broader notion, for on the one hand, it supplements political characteristics by, and combines them with social (and through them economic) while on the other hand, most frequently, although not always,[47] 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. 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…

As it was argued in chapter 1, section 3, at analyzing a society as a whole we look at the political system as at only one of its integral parts, in preindustrial cultures inseparable from all others (in the precolonial African context see on this point: Eisenstadt *et al.* 1988; Bondarenko 1995a), and hence should label the society according to its general societal type.  It ought to be noted that on understanding of societal forms, including the state, which involves both political and socio-economic characteristics, such significant for the development of anthropological thought and still influential theories as those of evolutionists (from Maine to Engels), of the French sociological (Durkheim, Mauss) and British structuralist (Evans-Pritchard, Fortes, Mair and others) schools, of substantivists in economic anthropology beginning with Polanyi, are based (see Earle 1994: 947), though, as to my mind, the most brilliant example of sociological, in the broad sense, approach to the state in anthropology is given by Robert Lowie in *The Origin of the State* (1927; see also the chapter on the state in his *Social Organization* [Lowie 1948: 317–346]).   Famous neoevolutionist concepts (Sahlins 1960; Service 1971/1962; 1975; Fried 1970/1960; 1967; Carneiro 1970; 2000a: 186; Haas 1982) also derive, more or less openly and this or that way, from this premise though, indeed, in the final analysis "the whole progression (from band to state. – *D. B.*) … is defined in terms of political organization" (Vansina 1999: 166).

I believe that scholars can use whatever definitions of the state they choose if it is appropriate for the purposes of their concrete research and if the definitions remain consistent throughout a single piece of it, but within the general theory framework the notion of the state must not be reduced to its political component.  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 specific kind of political organization, as the state is seen by them merely "… as a political or governmental unit…" (Marcus and Feinman 1998: 4).  The anthropologist Alain Testart in one of his recent monographs (2004) does proclaim the necessity of approach to the state as to "a specific social form" too, but, curiously enough, really analyzing the process of state formation from this viewpoint, he fully accepts purely political Weberian definition of the already formed state as of society in which "the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force" can be observed.[48]

All in all, the aforesaid is also true with the Early State concept (Claessen and Skalník 1978a).  Having eventually been developed into a reasonably organic combination of evolutionist and structuralist postulates (Claessen 2000c), it, in a contradictory way – taking into serious account social parameters (see Bondarenko and Korotayev 2003: 111–113), nevertheless also reduces the notion of the state to its political aspect (see Kradin 1991: 283;

Bondarenko 1993b: 193–194; 1998c: 19; 2001: 243–244; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000d: 14–15; Oosten and Velde 1994a: 10; 1994b: 294). In particular, this 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 toward 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 chapter 5, section 4). 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 his recent publications (2002: 102; 2003: 161) declares openly that the 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 embracing of the political aspect of social system) co-insides 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 theoretical construct 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, transformations, and prospects see Oosten and Velde 1994a; 1994b; Kochakova 1996a; 1999; Bondarenko 1998c; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000d: 12–16; Kradin 1998).

I shall not argue either (following Maine [1861; 1875], Morgan [1877], and Engels [1985/1884]), that the state in full sense begins when division by territory supplants that by kin practically completely, or in accordance with Claessen, that the "inchoate" but nevertheless state may be "… associated with dominant kinship, family and community ties in the field of politics…" (1978: 589).[49] I 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 overwhelmingly) dominate over those of kinship on the supralocal levels of society's complexity. This threshold is lower than that established particularly by Morgan but higher than the one sufficient for Claessen and other The Early State school adherents (besides Claessen 1978, *vide stricto* Claessen and Skalnнk 1978c; Claessen 1984; 2005a: 151–154; Claessen and Velde 1987: 4–5; Bargatzky 1987). 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.*).[50] As for the state in the narrower, merely political, sense – "the limited state", I

would regard as such the societies which have at least reached 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 a leading role in government administration…"[51] Indeed, the categories like "clear but not overwhelming dominance" sound not well-definable enough and probably even leaving too much room for a researcher's voluntarism, not for example like in case when the state is defined through the category of "the kinship ties absence", but such "milder" categorization does reflect and capture the evolutionist, gradual nature of the state formation process.

Even highly developed prestate cultures, like complex chiefdoms, are normally characterized as essentially kin-based societies (see Earle 1997: 5; Milner 1998: 2), and it is symptomatic that in his recent critical reevaluation of the Early State concept Peter Skalnнk, its author together with Henri Claessen, 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" (Skalnнk 2002: 6). Actually, long before that this fact was noted by the reviewer of the Early State project first two volumes (Claessen and Skalnнk 1978a; 1981a) Malcolm Webb (1984: 274–275). For "the inchoate early state" which I cannot regard as state in any sense at all, Claessen and Skalnнk postulated not only kinship ties domination but also "a limited existence of full-time specialists…" (Claessen 1978: 589), thus "rare" in such societies (Claessen and Skalnнk 1978c: 23), *i.e.*, such administrators do not form an objectively absolutely necessary and hence non-removable core of the government.[52] At this point, it is also worth noting Aidan Southall's (2000: 150) remark: "Claessen and Skalnнk (1978a) 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 Southall's "segmentary states" (1956; 1988; 1991; 1999) as states even more so. The same I shall say about Lawrence Krader's "tribe-states" or "consanguinal states" (1968: 4) the rulers of which exercise cohesive control but kinship still remains the basic principle of social organization, and which Bruce Trigger (1985: 48) rightly equated with Claessen and Skalnнk's inchoate early state.

In the meantime, what I see as a true and reliably verifiable criterion of territorial (*i.e.*, the state in its broader – full sense) organization, is the right and practical possibility for the government to carve up 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 structure and the right to manage their purely internal affairs, 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, with transition to the state the internal structure of communities tends to become simpler (Korotayev 1991: 183–184; Bondarenko and Korotayev 1999: 134), communalists are not only burdened by different obligations but also given the right to sell community's land what would have undoubtedly undermined the society's background if it had really been community-based.

The 3rd – 2nd millennia BC 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 1997a: 51, 60, 102, 105, 107; Diakonoff and Jakobson 1998; Baines and Yoffee 1998: 225–227; Kuzishchin 1999: 5–7). This is vitally important for an early state: if it fails to adapt the community to its needs, stagnation and decline of the political system follow (as, for example, in cases of the 19th century West African Samori's state and Kenedugu [Tymowski 1985; 1987: 65–66]). On the other hand, the community's adaptation to the needs of the state does not obligatorily mean the end of its development: the examples of the community and state structures' co-evolution are given, for instance, by medieval and early modern Northern India and Russia (Alaev 2000). In modern and contemporary polities structural discrepancies between the community and the state, the dependent position of the former with regard to the latter, are completely apparent (see, *e.g.*, McGlynn and Tuden 1991a: 181–272). Generally speaking, in a successful state supreme power does not develop the community matrix further on but rather "on the contrary begins to restructure society" in its own image (Beliaev 2000a: 194). Indeed, as Kurtz (1991/1984: 162) rightly points out, "… the reduction of the influence of local level organization upon the citizens" is "a major goal" of a state's legitimation strategies. If it is a success, "the encompassment of the local sphere by the state" (Tanabe 1996: 154) becomes the case.

### 3. Socio-political composition of Benin: interaction of the part and the whole

Nothing of the kind can be traced in Benin. As all other complex non-state societies, instead of enjoying one-way encompassment of the part (communities and chiefdoms) by the whole (concentrated in, and symbolized by the supreme power), Benin even after the change of dynasties still had to look for a pathway to their mutual adaptation. The result of this historical search was far from the establishment of "harmony of the whole and the part" typical of generally heterarchic societies, like ancient Greek (Andreev 2002: 791–800). 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 about seven centuries of its reign till the

establishment of the colonial rule had not resulted in socio-political homogenization: autonomous communities and chiefdoms with political institutions of their own continued to exist within the kingdom. Benin remained a "multipolity", that is a polity within which structural elements of different socio-political types and complexity levels coexisted and interacted (see Korotayev 1995b: 72–73; 1998b: 125–127; 2000: 195; Korotayev *et al.* 2000: 23–24). Undoubtedly, this situation's lasting for all the many – probably seven, 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".

Just this status of the society provided, above all, the presence of elements of heterarchy in the generally homoarchic socio-political order of the Benin Kingdom. In order to understand the nature of the relations between the socio-political whole and its components in the 13th – 19th centuries Benin, we must first look at the way they had co-existed in the preceding period of the First (*Ogiso*) dynasty, approximately in the 10th – 12th centuries.

The scarce evidence on these "Dark Age" of Benin history prompts that in those days the country was an agglomeration of chiefdoms. Chiefdoms had started to form in Biniland in the mid-1st millennium AD (Es'Andah 1976: 12–13; Obayemi 1976: 256; Bondarenko and Roese 1998; 1999: 545–546; Bondarenko 1999: 23–30; 2001: 55–65). A chiefdom could appear only under the leadership of an *onogie* (Bradbury 1957: 33; Egharevba 1960: 4), *i.e.* round a village with two heads of the local community as its center. For being able to place himself at the head of a chiefdom, the *odionwere* was too strongly connected with his native local community, was associated with it only, and was regarded to be the legitimate head of this community only as a descendant of its members' ancestors. His profane endeavoring was restrained by his sacral, ritual duties that were his most fundamental obligation, irrespective of whether the *odionwere* was the only head of the given community or shared his power with the *onogie* (see Bondarenko and Roese 1998: 369-371). The duties of the head of the chiefdom were similar to those performed by heads of extended families and communities at lower levels (Bradbury 1957: 33). There also was the chiefdom council that was similar to corresponding family and community institutions. Besides the heads of the whole chiefdom and constituent communities the council was formed by the chiefdom *edio* (Egharevba 1949: 11; Sidahome 1964: 100, 158, 164). Thus the senior age-grade played the leading part in managing the chiefdom, as it played it at the family and community levels (Bradbury 1957: 16). The *onogie*'s community was as privileged within the chiefdom as the family of the community head within the latter. On the other hand, the ancestors' cult of the chiefdom head was similar to those of the family and community heads but was performed at a higher level. At the same time it resembled the royal ancestors' cult but was performed at the lower level (Bradbury 1973: 232).

In the beginning of the 2nd millennium there were not less than 130 chiefdoms in Biniland (Obayemi 1976: 242). The linear earthworks – walls and ditches discovered all over the country, are signs of the chiefdoms' existence in the past and of their flourishing just immediately before and during the *Ogiso*s reign (Connah 1975: 237–242; Obayemi 1976: 242; Isichei 1983: 135–136, 265–266; Darling 1981: 115; 1984: I, 119–124, 130–142; II, 307; 1988: 127–131; Keys 1994: 13; Omoregie, O. S. B. s.d.) that gave an additional impetus to chiefdoms' further appearance and growth. The country's capital and unique symbol of its unity since the *Ogiso* time, Benin City, had also grown out of a chiefdom (see Onokerhoraye 1975: 296–298; Darling 1988: 127–129; Aisien 1995: 58–60; Bondarenko 1999) by the early 9th century (Roese 1990: 8; Aisien 1995: 58, 65; Bondarenko 2001: 65–66).[53] According to a version of the oral tradition, sixteen non-hereditary local rulers titled *owere*, no doubt identical with the village *oidionwere*, governed Benin before the First Dynasty was established (Omoregie, O. S. B. 1992–1994: II; Akenzua, C. A. 1994–1997: II, 1–3; Aisien 1995: 65).[54] If we may admit that there is a grain of truth in this relation,[55] we should suppose that the village around which Benin City later grew, had appeared somewhere in the middle of the 8th century. It is difficult to estimate when that village had integrated neighboring villages into the chiefdom of which Benin City later grew ripe but possibly it really happened in the late 8th – early 9th centuries.

The origins and nature of about a dozen other Bini protocities of the time (and so typical of complex chiefdoms [see Kradin 1995: 24]) was the same, but that was Benin City that gained victory and continued to grow due to obtaining of the exclusive political function and position while the other protocities went down to the level of big villages (Talbot 1926: I, 153, 156–157; Egharevba 1949: 90; 1960: 11–12, 85; Connah 1966: 23; 1969: 55; 1975: 242–243; Jungwirth 1968: 140, 166; Ryder 1969: 3; Igbafe 1975: 2–3; Onokerhoraye 1975: 296–298; Olaniyan 1985: 46; Darling 1988: 127–129, 133; Aisien 1995: 58–60; Bondarenko 2001: 65–71, 87–88, 90–95). So, the rise of chiefdoms was both a precondition and an aspect of the city formation process being an outcome of partly the same factors in particular, demographic growth and integration of agricultural communities (Obayemi 1976: 242; Shaw 1976: 59; 1984: 155; Clark 1977: 206; Connah 1987: 144–145).

The Bini chiefdoms were integrated, rather loosely, by the first *Ogiso* (the oral tradition holds down his name: Igodo) who according to some relations of the oral tradition that find archaeological and ethnographic proofs, came and hence brought the very institution of monarchy as a form of suprachiefdom political organization to Biniland from the Yoruba town of Ife (see Bondarenko 2001: 72–81, 86–96, 125–130; Bondarenko and Roese 2001; Roese and Bondarenko 2003: 40–50). The situation when a group of local socio-political units is integrated not by one of the respective units' leaders but by completely alien newcomers, was not very infrequent in the course of

African simple chiefdoms (see, *e.g.*, Mair 1970/1962: 109, 119–121; Oliver 1984/1970: 317–318; Anthone 2000) and states formation (see, *e.g.*, Mair 1970/1962: 125–137; Steinhart 1978; Oberg 1987/1940) but as for complex chiefdoms, it seems a rare case. The first *Ogiso*s hence were not heads of any local, Bini chiefdom. The very institution of the supreme ruler appeared in Benin not as institutionalization of the complex chiefdom ruler's authority but rather it was imposed on the Bini multiple independent communities and chiefdoms without any genetic, organic connection with them, their social structures and political institutions, well elaborated and acceptable enough for the existence just on these levels of social being.. But once the institution of the suprachiefdom supreme ruler was introduced, it was to be "filled" with concrete people, holders of the title and the authority on this level changing each other on the throne.

This ambivalence of the initial situation crucially determined the course of further events. The third *Ogiso* probably had become the last in the originally Ife line of rulers and after that about twenty *Ogiso*s in fact did not form a dynasty or dynasties[56] but initially were the heads of different Bini chiefdoms, strongest by the moment of the supreme ruler's change on the throne: when the Ife line of the *Ogiso*s left the stage of history, there remained nobody else but Bini simple chiefdoms' leaders to ascend the throne while all of them had basically equal rights for claiming to it what led to permanent struggle between the chiefdoms' heads for the *Ogiso* title and to frequent change of the dominant simple chiefdom in the political system of the Benin complex chiefdom. Only for the last eight reigns or so a true, and originally local, dynasty was established. It is evident that the dynastic principle's restoration can be estimated as a sign of consolidation processes' growth (in resistance to centrifugal) at the suprachiefdom level. Mainly just during this period the conditions for stable suprachiefdom institutions' existence in Benin grew ripe once and for all. The fall of the non-monarchical political experiment in the brief interregnum period and the subsequent consolidation of the Second dynasty confirm the aforesaid (for an historical reconstruction and historico-anthropological interpretation of the events mentioned in the paragraphs above, see: Bondarenko 2001: 72–107, 137–167; 2003a; Bondarenko and Roese 2001; 2004; Roese and Bondarenko 2003: 40–66).

In the course of the first attempt to establish a suprachiefdom authority and to integrate the society, apart of other measures taken (economic, ideological, political, military, etc. [see Bondarenko 2001: 86–105]), a number of all-Benin titles, some of which were later incorporated into the system of political institutions of the Second dynasty time, was introduced (for detail see Eweka 1992; Roese 1993; Bondarenko 2001: 108–117). However, holders of the all-Benin titles did not form an integral political apparatus. It can be regarded as "central" only quite conditionally. Originally, the majority of such titles belonged to the heads of chiefdoms and autonomous communities who

recognized the *Ogiso*s' supremacy but treated the *Ogiso*s "almost as *primus inter pares*" (Eweka, E.B. 1992: 7). It is reasonable to suppose that the titles (and corresponding duties) were introduced and established by local (simple-chiefdom) rulers as a result of a series of political compromises both among themselves and among them and the *Ogiso*s in the process of struggle for power. The situation with the earliest title-holders also demonstrates that strictly speaking, for long periods of time there was no permanent, stable "center of force" at all. Instead at different moments various "parts of the whole" played this part: chiefdoms changed each other on the top of the political hierarchy.

So, in the *Ogiso* period chiefdoms and autonomous (*i.e.*, not forming parts of any chiefdom within the kingdom) communities 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 specify it). The suprachiefdom authority was rather weak, and struggle between simple chiefdoms for supremacy in the Benin complex chiefdom was a normal course of events, and the whole socio-political system, though it clearly tended to be framed as homoarchic, was rather weak and friable. Nevertheless, although in the final analysis the *Ogiso*s turned out incapable to establish a really effective central authority, just

> [t]he *Ogiso* era established a common social sense of belonging to the same authority and hence the sharing of a common goal, purpose or destiny. The rise of the *Ogiso*s implanted monarchical traditions into the Benin political system. This monarchical idea survived in spite of stresses, temporary aberration in the kingship, the failure of the system and its substitution with republicanism. This was to give the Benin structure its basic social and political pattern which was crystallised under the *Oba*s (Igbafe 1975: 7).

In this, anthropological, respect the process of the institution of kingship's consolidation was evolutionary, not revolutionary (see *Ibid*.). "... [I]n Benin there was no sudden transformation of the political structure coinciding with the advent of the dynasty" of the *Oba*s (Ryder 1967: 31), though historically, the eventual downfall of the *Ogiso*s was provoked by a severe all-sided crisis during several last reigns while the start of the first *Oba*'s reign was preceded by a period of interregnum.

Eventually, presumably in the 13th century, the Second dynasty came to power in Benin. Its founder, Prince Oranmiyan, originated from Ife: for the Benin people only a man from that town could be a legitimate new dynasty founder, as Ife was the foremotherland of the institution of suprachiefdom authority in Benin as such – from there the First dynasty founder Igodo had arrived in Biniland. So, the authority of Oranmiyan and his descendants was to

be perceived as the legal "continuation" of that of the rulers of the First dynasty. Owe to this the feeling of the changes gravity was to deaden in people's hearts and minds. However in reality the evolution of political and social institutions during the *Oba* period has resulted in a meaningful transformation of the Benin society. In the time of the *Oba*s the same socio-political components – chiefdoms and autonomous communities (as before, equal to each other in terms of rights and obligations towards the supreme authorities of the time [Egharevba 1949: 79; Bradbury 1973: 177]) formed parts of a multipolity 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, now much more strictly: the homoarchic trend in the socio-political organization became much stronger and more visible than in the *Ogiso* time. The all-Benin power center and political institutions (the dynasty first and foremost) became stable and did not depend on the relative might of the local chiefdoms any longer, now surmounting them unreservedly. The head of a socio-political unit represented its population in higher instances, but leaders of families, communities, and chiefdoms had direct access only to one, immediately next to theirs, level of political hierarchy. Heads of families and non-autonomous communities could reach the highest instances only through those who occupied intermediate stairs. The more powerful all-Benin political institutions were becoming the more effective their control over chiefdoms and communities, as well as over the relations between them, was (Bradbury 1973: 149, 171). In particular, the increase of the society's integrity under the Second dynasty resulted in the fact that the interunit relations basically did not develop by the principle "our – alien" any longer, as the all-Benin level of realizing their unity by the population of the country formed.

Nonetheless, as has been stated above, the elements of heterarchy were neither a decoration nor a kind of Tylorian "survival" within the framework of the *Oba*-time socio-political system. Quite the opposite: they were an essential part of the system. In the way typical of African kingdoms (Vansina 1992: 21), 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-15$^{th}$ – 19$^{th}$ centuries). What is especially noteworthy is that there is no evidence that those units' internal composition could be changed under any circumstances (Bondarenko 1995a: 183–193; 2001: 257–264). Thus, in the time of the *Oba*s the political center still had substantially limited possibilities for exercising coercive authority because violence from its side could not be considered as legitimate if it were aimed directly at the society's component units. The real power of a chiefdom or autonomous community head (*onogie* or *odionwere* respectively) still was as greater as farther his chiefdom or

community was situated from the capital (Bradbury 1973: 178, f. 10), though officially the new head of a chiefdom, in the ideal, the senior son of his predecessor (Bradbury 1957: 33), was to be recognized by the *Oba* after consulting local seniors (Sidahome 1964: 49–50, 163). Sometimes especially mighty and rich *enigie* who even tried to imitate the *Oba* and his court in their way of life, entrusted themselves on their local level with some functions of the central authorities, such as endowing their subjects with titles (Bradbury 1957: 33; 1973: 178). Anyway, they did not forget to send "presents" for the *Oba* as signs of their obedience from time to time; not only to get them from heads of their dependent communities (Sidahome 1964: 60; Bradbury 1973: 177, 180). The heads of chiefdoms and autonomous communities were also responsible for collecting tribute for the supreme ruler, organization of corvйe labor upon the center's demands and so on. They also represented all their subjects at the *Oba* and central authorities in general.

The opinion of Dike (1959: 14) who argued that "the basis of Benin economy was heavy taxes that *Oba* collected from his subjects", that is common communalists by local and titled chiefs, seems wrong. In reality these were not taxes at all. Requisitions from commoners in favor of the supreme authority were a tribute which communities paid in kind (food, species of handicrafts, building materials for broadening and repairing of the palace complex). It is also important to point out that the size of the tribute did not depend on the quantity and quality of the land elaborated by this or that communalist. The tribute was collected from him as not from a land holder (which he was not in any case) but as from a subject of the *Oba*. There are also no grounds for arguing the communalist's personal attaching to land as well: as Sharevskaja (1957: 176) has emphasized, "there is no evidence of free communalists' attaching to land neither in early sources nor in the ethnographic materials. Vice versa, it is related not once that a peasant could clear a new plot for himself". Communalists laid roads, built bridges and so on (*e.g.*, Ajisafe 1945: 24, 34; Egharevba 1949: 42–43) but such corvйe works, though conducted on the initiative of the supreme authority and under the supervision of chiefs, were really public in some sense. They were fulfilled for the benefit of the whole people as all the Bini had the right to use those roads and bridges while the tolls collected for that enriched the all-Benin treasury. Besides, the authorities paid off for such a work, for example, in new wives (Talbot 1926: III, 434–435). In fact, contrary to the opinion once expressed by Sargent (1986), the Bini community was not exploited by the all-Benin institutions; there were no antagonistic social classes, clearly defined noble and mean estates or castes, as far as the community organization was all-embracing (Bondarenko 1995a: 257–264).

Members of the second age-grade, the *ighele* formed the basis of the Benin army. After military campaigns which became more often in the time of creation of the empire in the mid-15th – 16th centuries but still did not last long

(within several months), *ighele* returned to their native villages – into the habitual social milieu, to their usual tasks (Bradbury 1957: 32; 1973: 171; about the Benin army see Talbot 1926: III, 832–835; Roth 1968/1903: 125–130; Roese 1992b; Osadolor 2001).

The men's secret society *Okerison* was another important channel for the communalists' involving into the activities of all-Benin socio-political institutions. Though this was a supracommunity organization, it originated within the community and preserved tight connection with it. In the time of the Second dynasty the all-Benin *Okerison* co-existed in villages with local secret societies (Egharevba 1949: 87, 95; Sharevskaja 1957: 206; Roth 1968/1903: 65; Anonymous 1969/1652: 314; Нnjar 1972/1654: 250–251). In a certain situation interests of a person as of a member of the all-Benin secret society could come into conflict with local interests of his kin group or the secret society of the village. The *Oba* was recognized as the head of *Okerison*, and the political role of the all-Benin secret society consisted not in exercising punitive functions and intimidating of people for the sake of the public order's observation only (Palisot de Beauvois 1801). *Okerison* participated actively in communicating shine to the supreme ruler's sacral halo, in suggesting people belief in his omnipotence, omniscience, and absolute justice. In particular, *Okerison* members took part in many rituals and ceremonies of the supreme ruler and his ancestors' cults (Sharevskaja 1957: 205–206). It also lobbied actively this or that claimant for the throne and as a rule could influence the sovereign during the whole period of his reign (Dennett 1906: 199; Egharevba 1951a: 5–8; Roth 1968/1903: 65). Besides, *Okerison* controlled some distant from the capital parts of the empire (Dennett 1906: 199–201; Talbot 1926: III, 764). The social role of *Okerison* in the communal Benin society was significant as well. Its social function got entangled with the political one: the secret society was to promote consolidation of not only the supreme ruler's power but also the socio-cultural basement to which that power was so adequate. It is not by chance that *Okerison* acted on behalf of the ancestors.

Chiefdoms and autonomous communities preserved a grain of former being in opposition to the central authority, concentrated in Benin City. In the conditions of considerable strengthening of the latter, it was sublimated in the ritual sphere. Cults, rites, festivals rooted in the pre-*Oba* times existed in many villages. They reflected the opposition of the local and central (symbolized by the *Oba* first and foremost) authorities in the past. Of course, the capital did not greet their observation. The aforesaid is well illustrated by the example of the annual Ekpo festival which is popular to the south and east of Benin City (for its description and analysis see Lopasic 1965; Ben-Amos and Omoregie 1969). Ben-Amos and Omoregie (1969: 10) write that

> … the Ekpo cult can be seen as a representative of
> alternative values within Bini culture. In a society which
> focuses on the centralized power of a divine king, the

heroes and location of Ekpo represent a traditional source of opposition. Where all paths to prestige and political power converge in the capital, Ekpo emphasizes the ritual importance of the village.

In the meantime, although only the cases of those accused in doing harm to the whole country and especially to the *Oba* and his relatives were investigated at the central, all-Benin court, the *Oba* was recognized as not merely the supreme judge but also the only legitimate lawgiver. This was so not only due to his recognition by the subjects as their master in the sense described in section 3 of chapter 3, but first and foremost because the Binis saw the laws as not really "given" by the *Oba* but rather as his authoritative translations to them of the ancestors' behests, uncorrupted even slightly due to the sovereign's maximal spiritual proximity to the true lawgivers in the Binis' minds – the ancestors. However, though for the Binis the ancestors were the ultimate source of laws, in reality the regulations were rooted in community norms and traditions. Due to this new laws met no insurmountable barriers on their way from the *Oba*'s palace to communalists' houses.

In the period under immediate consideration in this work the country consisted not only of chiefdoms, autonomous local communities and – seldom – equal in rights unions of communities (Egharevba 1952: 26; 1965: 12) as before but also of the units of a new type, in which both the strengthening of the central authority compared to the *Ogiso* time and its still ambiguous position in the Benin multipolity revealed themselves. This new institution 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). The territorial expansion and titled chiefs' involvement in politically and financially profitable relations with Europeans contributed much to the "pseudochiefdoms" appearance in later historical periods (Ryder 1969). The titled chiefs were those who exercised the supreme power over communities and chiefdoms through the community and chiefdom heads in the name of the *Oba*. While chiefdom heads were more powerful farther from the capital their estates were due to their personal enterprise, the *Oba* himself granted pseudochiefdom heads more prerogatives more distant from Benin City the territory lay (Bradbury 1973: 150; Imoagene 1990: 28). The pseudochiefdom heads were to compensate, "voluntarily" or "in the performance of the duty", 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).

It goes without saying that this system had nothing essential in common with the feudal one, being realized in a society to which private landownership

and agricultural producers' attachment to land were unknown (Bondarenko 1995a: 251–253; 2001: 188). What is characteristic in the context of Benin realities is that 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 (Bradbury 1957: 33) 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 corvйe labor, recruiting of soldiers, etc. It is also very important to point out one more time is that *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). Last not least, 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 1957: 34; 1973: 177). Thus, in spite of differences in the degree of internal structural complexity, in the ways and time of appearance, the three basic types of the socio-political units which formed the Benin society were regarded equal to each other.[57] What equalized them was a "common denominator" – the supreme ruler's all-Benin power which surpassed them all.

However, though the autonomous communities, chiefdoms, and "neochiefdoms" were equalized to each other in the aforementioned respect, the real opportunities of their heads were not equal. For the chiefs-courtiers their duties as of neochiefdoms' heads were secondary to those imposed on them by high all-Benin titles. It can be said that their position in the society and its political circles was privileged by definition. In the meantime, for the heads of chiefdoms the way to the high life lay across a struggle for receiving or usurping of the all-Benin titles. As for the autonomous communities' heads, it looks like they did not have real chances to be reckoned among the political йlite at all. Finally, as has been mentioned above, the heads of chiefdoms were more powerful farther from the capital their possessions were situated. It was so because they displayed personal arrogance and enterprise. But in neochiefdoms the *Oba* usually himself gave their heads more power father from Benin City those units were situated. Thus, "voluntarily" or "in the performance of duties" the heads of socio-political units filled in the insufficiency of central authority's power in distant parts of the country that was still felt even in the Second dynasty time.

So, none of the territorial units of which the Benin Kingdom was composed 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).

## 4. Benin community, the encompassing part of the whole

The same way as multipolity reflected the nature of the Benin socio-political structure and was not a manifestation of the society's as though "transitional character", the agricultural community (*iya*), that combined kin (extended-family) and territorial ties, existed as Benin's substantial institution, the society's socio-cultural (as well as economic) basement, groundwork till the occupation of the country by the British (Bradbury 1957: 15; 1973: 149). The formation of *iya*s was related intrinsically to the transition from foraging to the manual slash-and-burn shifting agriculture[58] that had already been known in Biniland by the 1st century BC (Shaw, T. 1978: 68), and the area became predominantly agricultural during the first half of the 1st millennium AD (Ryder 1985: 371; Connah 1987: 140–141). Just in this period the extended-family-territorial community formed (for detail see Bondarenko 2001: 25–42).

The longevity of this type of community in Benin (it has remained unchanged in its essential features up to the postcolonial time[59]) was determined by the fact that under the conditions of the Biniland's climate, environment and soil, the manual slash-and-burn shifting agriculture turned out its optimal and actually hardly not the only possible system (Bradbury 1957: 23–24; 1973: 154; Egharevba 1949: 69; Blokhin 1993: 37) while for being effective this system demanded the features of social organization that could best be provided by a community with kindred extended families and elaborated system of cooperation in and among them: only a big collectivity with a system of mutual assistance and collective work can be able to perform all the operations of the manual agriculture cycle in the tropical forest (see Kochakova 1970: 18–25). Due to a variety of factors – climatic, demographic, etc., the agriculture in Benin was rather highly productive (see Bondarenko 2001: 41–42) and the Binis did not face the problem of foodstuff shortages (Nyendael 1705: 438; Anonymous 1969/1652: 315). So, the existence of the community with extended families was justified and necessary for a long historical perspective. Besides, yam was the main crop cultivated by the Binis, and "growing of tuber crops allowed to preserve the habitual way of life to a considerable degree and did not result in sharp refusal from the previous culture tradition…" (Shnirelman 1982: 37). Naturally, first and foremost this is true with the community: just in it the way of life and culture tradition were forming and transforming in time. Hence, the existence of the agricultural extended-family-territorial community as the substratum social institution turns out justified and necessary for the Bini in the historical very long run; in fact, for hardly not an immense prospect (Bondarenko 1995a: 101–117; 2000d).

The Bini community's overall homoarchic nature (reflected specifically in unequivocal dominance of senior men and men in general), its administrative system and the foundations of interaction with the supracommunity institutions have been described in the previous chapters and sections. In the present section the community's internal social structure and relations will be characterized in some detail, and the factors and mechanisms of the community's integration (mostly other than administrative, already discussed above) will be pointed out with the special emphasis laid on generally homoarchy-orienting encompassing importance of all this for the whole complex (in fact, supercomplex – more complex than middle-range) society.

Charles Maisels (1987; 1993) stresses that in what he calls "city-states", opposite to territorial "village-states" (see also Diakonoff and Jakobson 1982; Izard 1992: 14–16; Trigger 1993: 8–14 *et passim*; 2003: 92–119, 266–270, 665 *et passim*), not broad descent groups (such as sibs/clans) but lineage-based extended families (households)[60] were the basic mode of social organization. Though the city-state both as concept and term (see further: Burke 1986; Hansen 2000; Glassner 2004) seems to me unacceptable with respect to Benin (Bondarenko 1995a: 95), the latter definitely was a society of the very type Maisels and Trigger designated that way. However, there is 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.*, the 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.[61] Particularly, I have shown elsewhere that in Benin not 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, just the extended family was recognized as the smallest self-sufficient social unit (Bondarenko 1995a: 136–139; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000c: 174–176). Indeed, what unites both of the subtypes is that their core social institution is the household-based community of this or that type[62] but while the nuclear-family-based community is essentially predominantly non-kin, the extended-family-based one preserves in itself unilineal descent ties. Indeed, the bonds of unilineal (patrilineal) descent embrace all the Binis and are very important in their traditional culture's context (Bradbury 1973: 157–170).

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 1975/1668: 162; Gallwey 1893: 129; Thomas, N. W. 1910a: 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; Oghieriakhi 1965; Ahanmisi 1992: 98–100). This fact is significant: both qualitative analysis and quantitative research have revealed that general polygyny is a strong predictor of social homoarchy at both local and supralocal levels of complexity (Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000b: 309–312; 2000c; 2004: 26–38; Korotayev and Bondarenko 2000a; 2000b; 2001; Korotayev 2003a: 147–162).

Operating with the Mesopotamian evidence only, Maisels argues that kinship 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 sib/clan does not form the core economic unit in any society either, as it is delocalized: for example, married women from patrilineal sibs normally 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 the age lines, social in their function (Lowie 1948: 6–7; Eisenstadt 1966/1956; 1971: 66–71; Mair 1965: 50–52; Bocharov 2000). So, every extended family, like any other social unit (see above), demonstrates a mixture of kin and territorial ties by definition (see Olderogge 1975) 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, second, we ought to avoid postulating unilinear evolutionary sequence from the extended-family to nuclear-family community as they, being organized in general homo- and heterarchically respectively, represent the community's different types but not stages (see Gossiaux 2000: 166; see also, *e.g.*, Chkonija 1964; Ivanov 1998a; 1998b: 37–94; Alaev 2000: 15–201; Bondarenko 2004b), and third, 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 socio-economic unit is a rare case in the preindustrial world[63], incredible specifically in Benin where one-family communities, as has been noted above, could be observed very infrequently). 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 West Africa [Paque 1954: 53–54; Rouch 1954: 43]). In such a situation territorial ties did

predominate 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 homoarchic kinship ties, and thus the latter dominated in the community as a whole though in the interfamily relations they were intertwined with corporate (essentially heterarchic) ties of neighborhood.[64] The bigger the community the higher the role of it as a whole was, compared to that of a family as its constituent part (Bradbury 1957: 31).

Every extended family inhabited a compound divided into several parts, each occupied by a nuclear family – a grown-up man with all his goods and chattels, first of all with his unmarried children and wives whom he could have "as many… as he wishes and can feed" in addition to "a great number of concubines" (Dapper 1975/1668: 162). By the early-20th century evidence, an average Bini man at a mature age had seven wives including two already passed away (Thomas 1910a: I, 15).

By the ethnographic evidence of the mid-20th century, the basic productive units ("farming groups") most often were nuclear families (Bradbury 1973: 150–151, 153–154). On the other hand, Sargent (although without profound argumentation) supposed that during the first centuries of the Second dynasty period the productive unite still was community as a whole (1986: 403, 406, 408, 409).[65] In any case, even in the mid-20th century extended families had usually been preserving economic and consumption unity (Bradbury 1957: 27–30).

As has already been mentioned (with the relevant references), not nuclear but the extended family was the basic, substantial element of the community not in the economic respect only but socio-culturally as well. Precisely the extended family was recognized as the organism, self-sufficient at the lower level of social life. The structure-forming nature of the extended family becomes especially obvious if one takes into consideration the fact that besides economic interests, its unity was based on ideological foundations, such as, for instance, the hereditary extended-family totemic taboos (Dennett 1906: 231; Thomas 1915–1916, 1919–1920) and, most significantly, the ancestor cult, as far as its objects, though organized in a clear hierarchy of more and less important ancestors (Bradbury 1957: 56; 1973: 166, 231–233, 238–250), were worshipped by extended families as wholes disregarding the degree of an ancestor's kindred proximity to this or that nuclear family: there was no dominant nuclear family in an extended one.

One's not only formal status but also real weight in the community was directly connected with the person's position in the extended family (Sidahome 1964: 128). In particular, the obligation of the senior men – the *edion* age-grade members was to rule extended families, as well as communities. As it was pointed out above (chapter 3, section 4), definitely there was a kind of extended families junior members oppression. Strict and

total observation of the age and gender roles in the family was perceived by the Binis as an earnest of their whole society and whole universe's stability and well-being. Those roles were believed to be distributed once and for all according to the will of the supreme deity Osanobua. Our contemporary, the Benin Prince Iro Eweka (1998: 162), has expressed this order's basic principles metaphorically: "the structure of the family is analogous to the natural ordering of the heliocentric universe: the man (father) is the sun around which revolve the women (other 'planets'), around which revolve the children ('moons')" (see also *Ibid.*: 14).

However, though the system was really stable as a whole – at the social level, it was mobile at the individual level – for every person taken separately: in the course of time children became grown-ups; junior brothers substituted departed senior brothers; and once young women replaced elderly ones. The status of a senior relative could not be ascribed at birth or *honoris causa* while that of junior was not fixed forever. In the meantime, one's attempt to raise the status avoiding the generation principle could be not only too difficult for realization but also, no doubt, seem dangerous for the whole collectivity, while serving it was regarded as the supreme moral norm (see Bondarenko 1995a: 50–53, 178–180; 1997b: 106–109). The community itself was seen as "a single moral community and, ... to a considerable extent, there is conformity to this ideal" (Bradbury 1973: 184).

Archaeological and ethnographic evidence show that the Bini community was exogamous (see, *e.g.*, Talbot 1926: III, 540, 713–715; Darling 1984: I, 138). The ethnographic data testify that in the precolonial time the society was generally patrilineal with some elements of matrilinearity while the postmarriage residence was strictly virilocal; divorces were impossible (see, *e.g.*, Dennett 1906: 198–199; Thomas, N. W. 1910a: I, 47–62; 1910b; 1910c; Talbot 1926: III, 427–437, 460–467; Ajisafe 1945: 35–39, 41, 92–94; Egharevba 1949: 20; Legogie 1951; Bradbury 1957: 27–31; 1973: 152; Tong 1958: 110–116; Akpata, O. 1959; Igbafe 1970; 1979: 19–20; Keys 1994: 13).

Every community occupied a village. A visible sign of a community's integrity was the earthen rampart about three meters high that terminated its village's territory (the same way as more inclusive ramparts encircled chiefdoms). Symptomatically, that rampart was called *iya*, just like the community itself. Not by chance it "… probably functioned as a communal status symbol. [A rampart] … may at some stage have acted, in ritual terms, as a symbolic boundary between the real world and the spirit one" (Keys 1994: 13).

The strength of social ties in the community was supported by strong traditions of interfamily assistance (*e.g.*, Egharevba 1949: 43, 67; Bradbury 1957: 30; 1973: 183–184) supported by public morality reflected in the folk-lore (Butcher 1937: 346–349), by common festivals, beliefs – the ancestor cult first of all (the same as at the family[66] and supracommunity levels of socio-

cultural complexity).  As has been emphasized in the previous sections, the ancestor cult also determined such integrity-promoting phenomena as the community's collective landholding rights, the age-grade system, and the nature of the suprafamily institutions of power.

Naturally, no integrative factors could eliminate the conflict-provoking potential of the community completely.  No doubt, foundations for clashes were laid in its structural components and the principles of their interaction.  Bradbury (1973: 184) distinguished potential but, as he specifically pointed out, rarely actualized lines of social split: between extended families and the lineages associated with them – lateral branches founded by junior members of the families, between extended families, and (in the villages with two leaders) between the lineage of the *onogie* and other lineages.  It seems that the Binis themselves did not perceive the contradictions in the community as insurmountable often sublimating them in the ritual sphere because in their consciousness the social due had been brought to conformity with the must with the end of social creation of the world associated with the establishment of the *Oba* dynasty.

As Benin City had formed on the basis of a chiefdom – a homoarchic union of agrarian extended-family-territorial communities, the city not only inherited, but carried over the centuries and all the turbulence of history the communal character of social organization and indivisibility of craft from agriculture.  The citizens belonged to these or those extended families and communities, and practiced agriculture on their communities' plots outside the city boundaries alongside with crafts; in the city, possibly from the mid-15$^{th}$ century on (Ryder 1985: 385),[67] contrary to the hinterland, this or that community had usually been specializing in one of the crafts for many generations exchanging the produced articles on city markets, while supplying the *Oba* and his court with articles of every craft was a strict hereditary duty and privilege of definite city communities which had no right to trade in them. All this is specifically reflected in the layout and architecture of Benin City (see Onokerhoraye 1975: 304–305; Roese *et al.* 2001), that has been remaining divided into community wards consisting of compounds inhabited by extended families.  Thus, social organization of the city turned out generally identical with that of the village while this was also true with the structure of, and relations in communities and extended families in Benin City and her non-urban hinterland (for detail see Bondarenko 1991b; 1995a: 91–101, 117–124; 1995e; 1996e).[68]  Naturally, the ideological pillars that supported the communal social organization of the city were the same as in its agricultural hinterland (Híjar 1972/1654: 249).

As it has been emphasized above, the Bini community was of the generally homoarchic type, as it united kindred extended families (*egbe*s) organized just this way: with the only significant hierarchy within which senior males unavoidably dominated in any social context.  Historically, its formation

in the late 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC – early 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD marked the radical change in the type of subsistence and turned out the initial step on the way to the Benin Kingdom's appearance (see Bondarenko and Roese 1998). Anthropologically, community served as the model, a kind of pattern according to which the supracommunity levels were built up homoarchically too, though the transition to higher levels of socio-political organization was accompanied by significant changes (Bondarenko 1995a; 2001). 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 Binis' outlook (see Bondarenko 1995a: 24–89; 1997b). The complex society's integrity was guaranteed by principally the same various mechanisms as that of the community; ideologically, this part was played by ancestor cult first and foremost which ascribed legitimacy to political institutions from the society's bottom to top (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 it. Treating multiple in Benin art compositions with the *Oba* in the center flanked by dignitaries depicted smaller than the sovereign 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."

Thus, in Benin not the supracommunity 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 determination of the character of the mental-cultural, socio-economic, and governmental subsystems of the society.[69] The clue to many truly and already pseudo-, quasicommunal traits and features of the 13<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries Benin society is contained in the aforesaid, too. In particular, the mental aims of the Bini did not at all prevent from social stratification both in a community and in the wider Benin society opposing only to the destruction of their background, *i.e.*, to destabilizing of the society and whole universe. Owing to it precolonial Benin never saw private ownership for the means of production (the arable land first and foremost), class-and-estate stratification, doubts in the supreme ruler's sacrality and so on and so forth. However, if the community's integrity and socio-cultural background were provided, the picture of the universe and consciousness of the Bini to some extend even demanded their internal stratification because any integrity (including social) was seen as not homogeneous but hierarchically structured (Bondarenko 1995a). The specifics of the position of titled chiefs and the sovereign clearly witnesses to the kin communal principles' primary importance for the shaping of the political system and institutions. So, as the fundamental, basic socio-cultural, political, and economic institution, the extended-family-territorial agricultural community fastened all the taxonomic levels of the Kingdom's homoarchic

structure. Contrary to the situation of downwards encompassment when the encompassing role is played by politically and territorially most inclusive supralocal institution (for example, the chiefdom or state in societies of the respective types), Benin provides us with an instance of upwards encompassment.

# V

# How to Call Benin?

## 1. The local-institution-matrix complex societies

The preceding analysis (in the present work and elsewhere; see above) provides grounds for arguing that the character of a complex, *i.e.* middle-range, or supercomplex non-state society may be predetermined, at least to some extent, by the specifics of its local (substratum) institutions, such as the family and community, to a greater extent than by the ways of the local and supralocal levels interaction, in the process of which the relations of higher order nevertheless do originate (Bondarenko 1993b: 187). This is not an absolutely strict regulation at all but my with Andrey Korotayev (Bondarenko and Korotayev 1999; 2000c; 2001; 2004; Korotayev and Bondarenko 2000a; 2000b; 2001) and Herbert Barry III's (2003; 2005) quantitative cross-cultural research based on the largest available world-wide cross-cultural sample – the *Ethnographic Atlas* (Murdock 1967; 1981; Murdock *et al.* 1986; 1990) has nevertheless revealed a correlation between family size, community organization's characteristics, and the nature of supracommunity social and political institutions.

Our research has shown that though family size is by no means the only factor that determines the degree of community and (through it) supracommunity institutions' heterarchy and homoarchy, the statistically meaningful mass evidence from cultures of all the major economic types (foragers, cattle-breeders, horticulturists, and agriculturalists) and almost all the major culture areas[70] yet shows that family size is an independent variable in this case and that the most authoritarian form of community organization is peculiar to the associations that comprise extended families while the less authoritarian one is observed in the nuclear-family-based communities. The community-based societies can extend the community matrix to, and develop it at the supracommunal levels of organizational complexity in different directions depending on the nature of the respective community types. The community based on the nuclear family with the relations of equality among them more likely gives rise to a heterarchic complex society as it may seem natural and turn out easier and more convenient to reproduce the same kind of relations in the inter-community interaction. On the other hand, when a community itself is homoarchic (as in the majority of cases when it consists of extended families, especially when they are dominated by fathers individually,

not by a group of brothers [see Bromley 1981: 202–210][71]), a basically communal complex society can well turn out not less homoarchic than even a preindustrial state which in principle cannot be built up by a community matrix as no community type presupposes administering by professionals (as well as taxation – a specifically state's way of getting means for paying those specifically state's administrators). The process of community leaders' specialization in administration "from spare time to part time to full time" may be launched only from outside the community – by the supracommunity political institutions (Befu 1966).

One could doubt that the family size really affects the community's heterarchy on the following grounds. As is well known, there is a curvilinear relationship between family size and cultural complexity: the small families are more typical for both the most simple and most complex societies, whereas the large extended ones are for the medium complexity societies (Nimkoff and Middleton 1960; Osmond 1969; Blumberg and Winch 1972; McNett 1973; Levinson and Malone 1980: 86–87; Ember, C. R. and Levinson 1991: 83). However, the correlation between the number of levels of political hierarchy above the community and the family size (considered as a proper and verifiable criterion of a society's cultural complexity level) turned out significantly positive (a fast growth of the proportion of large extended families in relation to small ones with the formation of the supracommunity levels) for simpler societies (Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000c: table 3), whereas we got a significant negative correlation for more complex ones (*Ibid.*: table 4). The supposition that the family size influences the community's heterarchy / homoarchy not directly but through the factor of the very degree of community's complexity is also discredited by our results: the community's complexity and the family size affect the community's heterarchy / homoarchy rather independently (*Ibid.*: tables 19 – 22).

Similarly to the family size, polygyny affects the community's heterarchy negatively. In general, monogamous societies appear to have democratic communities significantly more frequently than the polygynous ones (Korotayev and Bondarenko 2000a: table 2). Like the family size, the polygyny also significantly correlates with such indicators of cultural complexity as the number of supracommunity levels and community / settlement size (*Ibid.*: tables 3, 4). As it was with the family size, there are grounds to maintain that polygyny is related to the community heterarchy relatively independently from the factor of cultural complexity.

In general, the family structure (determined in its turn by a large number of independent factors, both material, *e.g.* economic, and ideal, *e.g.* religious) can affect significantly the overall socio-political type and evolutionary trend of the respective societies. The family structure affects primarily organization of the community through its associated socialization practices (*Ibid.*: 197–201; see also Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000b) while, in

its turn, the latter is able to influence significantly the mode the supracommunity levels are shaped. Hence, one would expect reasonably (Korotayev and Bondarenko 2000a: tables 9, 10) to find a significant negative correlation not only between polygyny and family size, on the one hand, and the degree of community's heterarchy, on the other, but also with the measure of heterarchy of the highest level of political structure.

The typical ways of communities' integration also tend to differ in the cases of homoarchic and heterarchic complex societies. This way is forcible more often than not at the homoarchic societies, like chiefdoms and states, formation, usually in the result of subduing of the weaker communities (or other local units) by the stronger ones. Contrary to this, heterarchic socio-political complexity arises as an outcome of volunteer and (more or less) equitable joining up of local components, *i.e.*, by way of synoecism (Bondarenko 2000c: 215–216). The classical examples of this pathway are provided by the socio-political history of the Greek *poleis* in Antiquity, the Swiss Confederation in the Middle Ages, and the United States of America in Modern Time.

Thus, the heterarchy – homoarchy dichotomy rooted in the diversity of family and community types finds further development in the societies that enjoy supracommunity levels of socio-political integration, predetermining to a considerable degree the non-unilinear and alternative nature of the socio-evolutionary process in the world-wide scale. Indeed, the aforesaid does not mean the community's disappearance: the state ripens out and exists for a long time not within the community but on the joint of communities – in the intercommunity relations (as a rule, mediated by the relations between associations of communities – chiefdoms, tribes and so forth) and eventually, having formed, towers above them (see chapter 4, section 2). 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 [1987/1940] and Freedman [1958] respectively). The strength of the lineage organization may serve as a testimony of weakness of state control in a state's frontier regions (Potter, J. M. 1970: 130–138), or, thus in other cases, of a society's non-state status.

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 pharaoh as its leader, and as not a neighbor [community] but a kin one…" (Diakonoff and Jakobson 1998: 27; see also McNeill 1963: 72). Though in my opinion the presence or absence of bureaucracy is a proper indicator of state or non-state nature of a society, the very prospects for its political organization's becoming bureaucratic may arise not from the presence or absence of the community but from its essentially communal or non-communal foundations. The situation when the family, lineage, and community organization influences directly the form and nature of supralocal institutions was reversed with the rise of the state which tends to encompass all the spheres of social life including such an important one as family relations (Trigger 2003: 194, 271, 274; see also, *e.g.*, Schoenbrun 1999: 143–145; Crest 2002: 351–352, 353).

## 2. Heterarchic local-institution-matrix (super)complex societies

So, a heterarchic community-matrix-based complex (middle-range) or supercomplex society with higher probability can appear in the milieu of the small-family (neighbor) communities, also heterarchic in their nature (Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000c; see also Blanton 1995; Bondarenko 1998d; 2000c; 2004b). As well as homoarchic cultures (see section 4 below), the societies of the heterarchic macrotype have varied considerably in their particular types (see Ehrenreich *et al.* 1995; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000a: 155–251). Among examples of the socio-cultural and political complexity based on the heterarchic neighbor community matrix one of the most vivid is given by the ancient Greek *polis*. It is noteworthy that as a socio-political model the *polis* was known far beyond antiquity, both in the chronological and geographic respects (Korotayev 1995c; Bondarenko 1998d). The *polis* 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 lack of it either, and hence was not state (*e.g.*, Berent 2000a; 2000b. Joyce Marcus and Gary 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; Моssй 1969; Vliet 1987; Tumans 2002: 285–369).[72] 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).

Democracy as the political regime that exemplifies "the ideal

representation of a power *heterarchy*" (Crumley 1995: 3; emphasis in the original; see also Vliet 2003) nevertheless must not be identified and confused with heterarchy as social system: in particular, the unavoidably heterarchic *polis* social framework admitted not only democratic but also viable 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 *polis* 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 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 have divided the polity's territory arbitrarily, ignoring the natural division that had resulted from local communities' synoecism as not only the historically first but also most frequent means for the *polis*' very formation (*e.g.*, Andreev 1976; 1979; 2002: 776–783; Snodgrass 1980; Frolov 1988; Luce 1998). Even Cleisthenes who in the last decade of the 6th century BC changed radically the Athens' general administrative system struck the blow not on local communities but on the four archaic *philai* which were tribes (Marinovich and Koshelenko 1996: 15). Furthermore, for Greeks the *polis* was not a political or territorial unit first and foremost but a self-governing (*i.e.*, never bureaucracy-governed even in theory!) 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; 2005; Hansen 2002; Grinin 2004a[73]) 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 should not lead to the conclusion that the state cannot be democratic or non-monarchical (what, for example, Grinin [2004a] 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 preindustrial state societies, especially in early states or civilizations (see Claessen 1978: 535–596; Trigger 2003: 71–91, 264), 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). The tendency to gradual transformation into an oligarchic bureaucratic state (at formal legal equality of all citizens) also clearly revealed itself in the course of the Novgorod Republic's history until the tendency was stopped at a very late stage, if not after its full realization, as an outcome of Novgorod's integration into the Moscow Kingdom in 1478 (Bernadsky 1961). The integration was predetermined by military defeat from Muscovites in the Shelon' river battle seven years earlier; characteristically, "degeneration of the Novgorod feudal democracy into open oligarchy during the 15th century led to lack of support of the boyar (patrician. – *D. B.*) government by the city lower strata. Just this determined the defeat of the republic" (Khoroshkevich 1992: 453–454). In the Hanseatic city of Rostock in the late 15th – early 16th centuries "… patricians formed not only the economically mightiest alignment of the city's population". During this period "they also concentrated in their hands absolute political power, the oligarchic character of the city self-government in the period under consideration increased. The right to sit in the city council was usurped by a limited circle of patrician families…" (Podaljak 1988: 131). The socio-political order of many other maritime trade-based independent cities of late-medieval Southern and Northern Europe eventually became basically the same (Schildhauer *et al*. 1985; Brady 1991; Shaw, C. 2001). 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 *polis*, not all the citizens were eligible for being elected. To be sure: in oligarchic *polis* 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 *polis*. 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 1985/1938: 131–135; Allen 1983: 75, 109 *et al.*; Diakonoff *et al.* 1989: II, 322–330, 342–345; Fernoux *et al.* 2003: 89–114; Picard *et al.* 2003: 57–82). 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.

So, the *polis* was a heterarchic community-matrix-based complex society. As well as, for example, the generally analogous to it Roman *civitas*, it keeps within the paradigm of evolutionary pathway outlined by Korotayev (1995c:67–68): indeed,

> there are… grounds for doubting the correctness of the widely accepted essentially unilinear scheme of socio-political evolution "community (local group) – chiefdom – (complex chiefdom) – early state – mature state". One of the possible alternatives [is] "(relatively) simple community – sovereign community with a well-developed internal political structure – civil community (*polis*)", where "civil community" may reach (according to many indicators of general social evolution) levels of development comparable with (or even exceeding) those typical for many chiefdoms and early states…

Thus, Korotayev bases his constructions on contrasting cultures that followed the pathway of political centralization and authorities' surmounting the society to cultures that elaborated further and perfected democratic communal backgrounds and corresponding institutions of self-government. Such a classification is no doubt congenial for the present writer who considers the division of cultures into hierarchical and heterarchical as fundamental one. However, both the "classic" and Korotayev's schemes are merely logical models. Not in every particular historical case at all, not in every culture throughout its period of existence, any of the respective schemes realizes in full extend and without intersections with other evolutionary series (see Blanton 1998).

The Benin evidence can make the general picture of socio-political evolution more versatile. As a matter of fact, the ancient *polis* – a volunteer and equal in rights integration (synoecism) of autonomous in their internal affairs neighbor communities into a supercomplex civil community and the society of the Benin type are respectively heterarchic and homoarchic "paraphrases" of each other (Bondarenko 1997c: 13–14, 48–49; 1998d; 2000c). The differences in the socio-cultural foundations – the community type, economic backgrounds (plough and hoe agriculture respectively), in the historical pathways of formation, etc. resulted in crucial differences in the realization of communal principles in the Greek *polis* and in Benin.

For example, the *polis* order is based on private property (including that on land) while in Benin it was incredible. If in a ripen *polis* the source of power and legitimate lawgiver was the people, in Benin those were ancestors in whose name the heads of socio-political units of different levels spoke and

acted.  The *polis* culture was individualistically-corporativistic, with a positive evaluation of reasonable innovations[74] while the Benin one was collectivistic and strongly tradition-oriented, archaic in terms of Karl Jaspers's (1953/1949) typology of culture.  Indeed, there was no political despotism in Benin; there was despotism of another sort – that of traditions.  If we depart from the Weberian formulation of power as the ability to circumscribe people's behavioral alternatives (Weber 1978), we will have to confess that just the traditions were true power in the full sense of the word in the Bini culture.  It is also evident how differently the political life in the societies of two types was organized.  In the final analysis the nature of the differences between them is in the fact that the *polis* was a civil society while Benin was very far from its ideals, they were absolutely strange for her.

### 3.  Benin as a homoarchic local-institution-matrix supercomplex society

Returning to Benin, we must underline once again that the homoarchic extended-family-based community is still alive even today being the most adequate social framework for agricultural production in the Western African tropical forest zone (see chapter 4, section 4).  However, what is even much more significant with regards to the present work's problematics, is that the way of the Benin Kingdom's formation was through "likening" of the supracommunity 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.*, Nyendael 1705: 452–453; Anonymous 1746: 103; Bradbury 1957: 42–43; Agbontaen 1995: 122–123), etc. – all corresponded to the homoarchic character of the society.  Any interaction with suprafamily 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 supreme ruler.  The very price of human life in Benin depended on one's social position: especially in the slave-trade era but also before it sacrificing of a number of people, depending on the deceased' status was an obligatory element of the most highly ranked chiefs and the *Oba*'s burial and mourning ceremonies (Kalous 1969: 375–376; Ryder 1969: 71; Ebohon 1972: 55; Resende 1973/1798: 348; Dapper 1975/1668: 164; Roese 1992a).

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.

This is a nicely distinct condensed formulation of the Benin society's homoarchic nature.

To sum up, Benin cannot be considered as a state in terms of either Marxism (see also Kochakova 1986: 9, 11; with respect to African "kingdoms" in general see Tomanovskaya 1973), including "structural Marxism", or (neo)evolutionism, or structuralism; even the existence of the monarchy does not presuppose the state character of society (Vansina *et al.* 1964: 86–87; Vansina 1992: 19–21; Quigley 1995; Oosten 1996; Wrigley 1996; Wilkinson 1999; Simonse 2002; Skalnнk 2002) just the same as non-monarchical form of government does not inevitably predict a society's non-state nature. 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; 1996c; 1998e; 2000b: 106–117; 2001: 230–263; 2004a; 2005a).

Having appeared as a result of integration on the basically communal principles of not only autonomous communities but also chiefdoms, furthermore – as a reconfiguration of the complex chiefdom of the *Ogiso* time, the megacommunity not only preserved chiefdoms as its structural component but also did not deprive them from sovereignty in their internal affairs. Vice versa, from the *Ogiso* time the megacommunity inherited and even strengthened such traits, characteristic of the complex chiefdom (see Kradin 1991: 277–278; 1995: 24–25) as, for example, ethnic heterogeneity (Ryder 1969: 2) and non-involvement of the suprachiefdom level managing elite in the subsistence production (see Bondarenko 1993a: 156–157; 1995a: 229, 253). The degree of social stratification in the society also increased (see Bondarenko 1993a; 1995a: 90–275). In the final analysis, as Ryder (1969: 3) rightly points out, without chiefdoms and their evolution the Benin empire could have never risen.

But while the simple and the complex chiefdom represent basically the same, chiefdom pattern of the socio-political organization, the same "quality" of authority and power ("The general rights and obligations of chiefs at each level of the hierarchy are similar…" [Earle 1978: 3]), the difference between both of these types on the one hand, and the megacommunity on the other hand, is really principal and considerable. In particular, *Ogiso*s had no formalized and legalized apparatus of coercion at their disposal. While the formation of effective central authority is vitally important for the complex chiefdom (see above), it usually proves unable to establish political mechanisms preventing the disintegration (Claessen and Skalnнk 1981b: 491; Cohen 1981). Hence the breakdown into

simple chiefdoms and independent communities is the typical fortune of the (complex) chiefdom (Earle 1991: 13). Thus, the megacommunity is a possible way of transformation of the complex chiefdom; a "positive" way in the sense that it is alternative to a complex chiefdom's disintegration. So, evidently, the break-down was the fortune of the majority of the 130 early Bini chiefdoms, and about ten protocity settlements mentioned above, potential centers of complex chiefdoms, like the *Ogiso* Benin one did not consolidate their power over neighbors and degraded to the level of big villages. Sooner or later they were absorbed by Benin.

Only the Benin megacommunity of the 13–19th centuries (for correctness, in this case it should be said "the megacommunity political institutions") formed the real "center" that was "above" all the sociopolitical components of the country and was able to establish really effective suprachiefdom authorities. And just this became the decisive "argument" in the competition of Benin with other "protocities" for the role of the all-Bini center. Not occasionally Benin started dominating over them right after the submission of the *Uzama* by *Oba* Ewedo, from the second half of the 13th century (see Bondarenko 1995a: 94–95). Due to the same reason the megacommunity institutions, including the monarchy of the *Oba* dynasty and different categories and associations of titled (megacommunity) chiefs were stable and sustained. Just because of this we may argue that under the *Oba*s one socio-political system based on the extended family (that of the *Ogiso*s period: autonomous communities + chiefdoms ≈ complex chiefdom) was changed by another: autonomous communities + chiefdoms = megacommunity. Having the same number of complexity levels and socio-economic basis as the complex chiefdom of the *Ogiso* time, the megacommunity surpassed it in economic development, governmental apparatus' elaborateness and effectiveness, the degree of internal integrity and centralization. Furthermore, in territory, social organization complexity, economic parameters, the governmental apparatus' hierarchization, spiritual culture the Benin megacommunity, fundamentally based on the kinship principle, was not inferior to many archaic states.

Features of the communalists' thinking, consciousness, Weltanschauung were adequate to the conditions of life in the megacommunity. No doubt, this is not a co-incidence but a display of their interdependence that the "objective" socio-political structure was paralleled by "subjective" Binis' vision of the person and the world. The Binis believed that every person had four soles that demonstrated different degrees of separateness from his or her physical membrane (Bradbury 1973: 271–282). The universe was seen by them as a 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. The community was perceived by the Binis as the socio-cultural focus of society and hence the core of the whole world's core, as for them their society literally was the hub of the universe. It turned out a model of the universe (a system of circles) and its most important part in one and the

same time.  The fact that the community comprised kindred extended families as its basic units was of fundamental importance because it led to the community's eventual generally homoarchic socio-political structure and non-democratic value system.  In the community the preservation and transmission of culture in the broadest meaning of the notion were performed.  Bradbury (1973: 249) pointed out specifically the ability of the Binis' consciousness to adapt to changes in the socio-political sphere.  The changes were ignored in that capacity being considered just as reflections (similarities) of what had already once existed in the rapid succession of events.

The Binis believed that the community organization, the only conceivable for them on the Earth repeated in the world of deities and ancestors' spirits (Talbot 1926: II, 267–268; Gallwey 1938: 5; Sidahome 1964: 118–124, 160–163, 166–172; see also Bondarenko 1992).  Furthermore, only a community-based society could be similar to the "construction" of the Binis' universe: to be a system of concentric circles and not of social segments (Bondarenko 1995a).  As in the circles of the universe on the whole, in its main circle each mini-circle (in the cosmic scale) was similar but not identical to the previous ones, narrower in structure and functions reproducing them at a higher level in the social, political, and cultural respects, so that changes from one circle to another were not only quantitative but qualitative as well (what becomes clear, for example, at comparison of rulers of socio-political units of different complexity levels).  Thus, in the socio-cultural respect, the circles of the megacommunity were brought into correlation with each other by the principle of similarity, so characteristic of African cultures (Girenko 1991: 288; Sledzevski 1992; Bondarenko 1995a: 50).

The megacommunal nature of the society also determined and in the same time was reflected in the continuity, characteristic of it: political – similarity of administrative institutions of different levels, socio-economic – of the city and the village, mental – fundamental similarity of the town and village dwellers, commoners and chiefs' Weltanschauung, at least in the "pre-European" time (for detail and bibliography see: Bondarenko 2001: 190–191). The integrity of the whole construction of the megacommunity was provided by basically the same mechanisms as that of a community (see above and, for more detail, Bondarenko 1995a: 176–180) while at the same time its very existence and prosperity of the populace was believed to be guaranteed by the presence of the dynasty of sacralized supreme rulers (*Oba*s).  The royal palace, the public relic with the *Oba* "imprisoned" in it (from the early 17th century), was seen by the Binis as the focal point of the universe as situated at the very heart of their society – the cosmos' hub.

Precisely the role of the main symbols of the all-Benin integrity and not that of "profane" administrators turned out the most important historical destiny of the sovereigns.  In their sacral functions the nature of both the whole society as a megacommunity and the sovereigns as a "megachiefs" have

revealed themselves especially clearly (see Palau Marti 1964; Kochakova 1986: 197–224; 1996b; Bondarenko 1991c; 1995a: 203–231). In particular, the supreme ruler's family (as well as those of titled chiefs) had not only been preserving its traditional structure but also generally existed in accordance with the norms determined by that very structure (see Bondarenko 1995 a: 194–203). Indeed, all the initial backgrounds of power in the community (the selection of the *odionwere* from the family considered as that of the community founders, the sacrality aspect, functions of the priest, manager of public lands and judge, "inspirer" of public works, etc., etc. at the lack of absolute power) found their continuation and further development in the institution of the *Oba*. For example, the ancestor cult of the *Oba* became an all-Benin one and he himself was an object of worshipping, and the *Oba* himself was the supreme priest of the whole country. He was considered all-mighty and the only legal lawgiver. In the course of time the supreme ruler received the right to appoint lineages from which the majority of the central government chiefs were recruited. If in the community the property was inherited alongside with the title, on the megacommunity level material values and the prestigious position, that of the *Oba* first of all were distinctively separated from each other (see Bondarenko 1993a: 151–158; 1995a: 203–229). The *Oba* was considered the master of all the lands, though in reality he had not more rights for them than an *odionwere* for his community's fields, and so on and so forth. At the same moment the Benin evidence does refute unreservedly the scholars (*e.g.*, Guliaev 1972: 261–262) in whose opinion sacrality of a supreme ruler is an *a priori* testimony of a despotic political system. The Benin *Oba*s never had absolute profane power; even more so, during the first about half a century after the Second dynasty's establishment and the last about three hundred years before the Kingdom's loss of independence in 1897 their profane power was far even from being called considerable.[75]

Megacommunity 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 was in integration on a rather vast territory of a complex, "many-tier" society predominantly on the basis of the transformed kin principle supplemented by a "grain" of territorial one. This basis was inherited from the community, within which extended families preserved kinship relations not only within themselves but with each other as well, supplementing them by the relations of neighborhood.

Sex and age remained the basis of socio-political stratification well beyond the community. At all the socio-political levels women were generally deprived from control sticks while at determining a man's status and social opportunities his membership in this or that age-grade could be not less

important than belonging to a more or less noble family. The division into the elder and the younger was the primary one for both the community and the society as a whole. This way the gerontocratic principles and forms of communal government, on the one hand, and the evidently homoarchic (conic) type of the Benin megacommunity, on the other hand, were determined. Indeed, the prevailing of the sex-and-age principle of socio-political stratification (sanctified by the ancestor cult, the backbone of the Binis' picture of the universe [Bondarenko 1995a: 24–31]) was clearly felt in the upper circles of the megacommunity. In this respect the fact which Ajisafe (1945: 13) tried to comprehend is very revealing: "Though naturally, personality played a great part, there were certain chiefs and elders who by reason of their age and experience exercised more influence in the affairs of the land and in the Council (at the supreme ruler. – *D. B.*) than their rank would seem to warrant. It may thus be admitted that apart from the personality of any particular chief, age is respected more than their rank and rank is respected more than the law" (see also *Ibid.*: 87–88).

In the Bini community kin ties were accompanied and supplemented by territorial ones. No doubt, in the megacommunity the importance of territorial ties grew considerably. However, as well as before its formation, such ties were built in and to the kin relations not in the ideological sphere only but in realities of the socio-political organization as well (Bradbury 1957: 31). The community did not just preserve itself: it went on playing the part of the fundamental socio-political institution notwithstanding the number of complexity levels overbuilding it. As before, the community predetermined the homoarchic nature of the whole Benin socio-cultural and political model and fastening all the levels of the Benin society's structure, made it was firm and durable: Benin remained a megacommunity till the very end of her independent development.

Even in the mid-15th – 19th centuries, when the initially local, communal nature of the society came into contradiction with the imperial political and cultural discourse, the principles and system of governing the empire (the preservation of local rulers in subjugated lands, migrations of the *Oba*s' relatives with followers to weakly populated territories, residing of the Bini governors of the dependencies in Benin City and not in "colonies", the use of the same ideological pillars that supported the *Oba*s' power in Benin for substantiation of the center's domination in the dependencies, etc., etc.) witness that by the moment of Benin's occupation in 1897 the megacommunity still was the form of organization of the Benin society proper with which socio-politically different "colonies" sided. Thus the megacommunity had turned out able to absorb and "reinterpret" those elements of the imperial discourse that could have seemed insurmountable for this essentially local, ethno- and socio-centric form of organization. So, the megacommunity managed to avoid radical transformation of its fundamental socio-political principles and the

    interrelated transformation of the people's mentality and picture of the universe.

## 4. The Benin megacommunity in the wider context of anthropological theory

Besides the 13th – 19th centuries Benin, I shall also designate as megacommunity, for instance, the Bamum Kingdom of the late 16th – 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). Analogously, in traditional kingdoms of another part of that modern country, in the Grasslands, "the monarchical system… is… in no way a totally unique and singular form of organization but displays a virtually identical structure to that of the lineage groups" (Koloss 1992: 42). Outside Africa megacommunities may be recognized in the Indian societies of the late 1st millennium BC – first centuries AD. 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 (see also Lielukhine 2001; 2004). In the south of India this situation lasted much longer, till the time of the Vijayanagara Empire – the mid-14th century when the region finally saw "… the greater centralization of political power and the resultant concentration of resources in the royal bureaucracy…" (Palat 1987: 170). A number of other examples of supercomplex societies in which "the supracommunity political structure was shaped according to the community type" (similar to the Bini type) is provided by the 1st millennium AD 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 the megacommunity may be seen among not only "city-based" societies like Benin, but among "territorial" ones as well. The specifics of the megacommunity becomes especially apparent at its comparison with the "galaxy-like" states studied by Tambiah (1977; 1985) in Southeast Asia. Like these states, a megacommunity has the political and ritual center – the capital which is the residence of the sacralized ruler – and the near, middle, and remote circles of periphery round it. However, notwithstanding its seeming centripetality, a megacommunity culture's true focus is the community, not the center, as in those Southeast Asian cases.

    Indeed, "extensive socio-political systems can be legitimized in

kinship terms…" (Claessen 2000c: 150). Really, "in most early states, ... overarching identities were usually expressed in terms of symbolic kinship, with gods, kings and queens often portrayed as the 'fathers and mothers' of their people" (Spier 2005: 120; see also Trigger 1985). Thus it was typical of the early states' subjects to perceive the state by analogy with the family and the sovereign by analogy with its head (see, *e.g.*, Ray 1991: 205; Vansina 1994: 37–38; Tymowski 1996: 248). Exceptions to this rule could be represented by not numerous in history vast pristine "territorial states", for example in Egypt or China, where the supreme ruler's sacrality was universalizing by character, destined to substantiate the ideology of territorial state by overcoming the resistance of the ideology of kinship (Demidchik n.d.). Furthermore, not infrequently the connotations of society with a family and of an authoritarian ruler with a family's head turn out consciously exploited for the sake of power's firmer legitimation in mature states either, as it was, for example, in the $16^{th} - 18^{th}$ centuries France (Crest 2002). Queen Elizabeth I of England in the $16^{th}$ century refused to marry as her ideological premise was that she was mystically betrothed with her nation, and the royal propaganda persistently represented her as "the Mother of the Country" (Smith, E. O. 1976). In pre-1917 Russia the paternalistic discourse of the monarch – subjects relations if not instilled officially and formalized, yet was cultivated in mass consciousness and determined crucially the popular ideas of the ideal sovereign's way of behavior and responsibilities (Lukin 2000), being reflected and expressed vividly in many widely-used idioms such as *tsar'-batjushka* ("tsar-father") or *tsaritsa-matushka* ("tsarina-mother"). Even Joseph 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 (while children at kindergartens and primary schools were encouraged to call the leader of the socialist revolution "grand-dad Lenin" till the very end of the Soviet era), and the founder of the modern secular Turkish state is known under the name of Atatürk – "the Father of the Turks."

So, it is obvious that the idea of likening a society to a family and hence its ruler to the latter's head looks natural and suggesting itself within the figurative thinking framework, and it is not by chance that this image was readily exploited already in ancient states of the East and the West, Confucius's teaching being the most prominent but not at all the only one of the respective sort (see Nersesjants 1985; Stevenson 1992). It is also clear that this ideological postulate was not a complete innovation that appeared with the rise of the state but an outcome of reinterpretation under new circumstances of an older, prestate ideology[76]. In Benin, typically for an African society disregarding its classification as a state or not (Diop, T. 1958–1959: 16; Armstrong 1960: 38; see also, *e.g.*, Kaberry 1959: 373; Tardits 1980: 753–754; Tymowski 1985: 187–188; Ray 1991: 205; Skalnнk 1996: 92), political relations were "naturally" perceived and expressed in kinship terms, too. 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 an 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 [1981a], Cohen [1981], Smith, M. Estellie [1985], Spencer [1987], Earle [1991], Anderson, D. [1994; 1996] 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 able to transform into states. The fate of all but one numerous Bini chiefdoms of the mid – late $1^{st}$ – early $2^{nd}$ 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; 2004a: 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 1978: 589–593; Claessen and Skalnнk 1978b: 641; 1978c: 23) or "archaic" (Feinman and Marcus 1998) states. In particular, the Benin megacommunity was not inferior to many states – societies in which bureaucracy presents, including the so-called "transitional early states" characterized by the Early State concept adepts as ones in which territorial ("social") ties dominate over kin (Claessen 1978: 589; Claessen and Skalnнk 1978c: 23), and as one of which Benin is even sometimes attributed (Kochakova 1994), erroneously, as I believe I have managed to show above. The Benin evidence reveals that not only heterarchical but also homoarchical societies can reach a very high level of sociocultural complexity and political centralization without ever transforming into a state during the whole long period of existence (Bondarenko 2005a).

As is known, it has gone without saying till recently that precisely state formation (and social classes emergence in the Marxist theory) marks the end of the primeval epoch and no alternatives to the state exist. All the *non*-state societies were proclaimed *pre*-state, occupying a lower stair than states on the only evolutionary staircase. However, these postulates do not look so indisputable now. For example, Berezkin (*e.g.*, 1995a; 1995b) and Korotayev (*e.g.*, 1995a; 1995b; 1996) have shown convincingly by the ancient Middle Eastern and South Asian evidence that under specific conditions (environmental first and foremost) the tribal or acephalous organization turns

out capable to substitute effectively that of the chiefdom and complex chiefdom, or even the early state. Possehl (1998), Grinin (2000a; 2004b), Kradin (*e.g.*, 2002a) and some others write about alternatives to the state and find "alternative" cultures in different parts of the world. As a matter of fact, the question is alternatives to the state, typically seen as though the inevitable form of the supercomplex socio-political organization. In its turn, the historical existence of alternatives to the (preindustrial) state is a manifestation of the more general facts of the socio-political evolution's non-unilinearity, of the human history's alternativity. Let us clarify the point: of course, the reality of the state from antiquity on as a historical phenomenon is beyond any doubt. However, it is only one form of the preindustrial supercomplex socio-political organization among rather a significant number of others that also turned out able to guarantee the societies effective solutions to the problems of the highest degree of complexity they had to face. In particular, the recognition of such a complex and developed society as the 13th – 19th centuries Benin as a non-state one in fact, means the rejection of the glance at the state as the only possible form of the typologically post-(super) complex socio-political organization.

The data historical anthropology of the Benin Kingdom provides, besides the fact that not only generally heterarchic but also generally homoarchic societies can reach the level of supercomplexity never transforming into states, testify that local communities' autonomy is not a guarantee of a complex society's advancement along the heterarchical pathway (see Bondarenko 2001: 259–261; Bondarenko *et al.* 2003: 7–8). Actually, this is not guaranteed for sure even if the community itself is not homoarchic (like in Benin) but heterarchic though in such a case the probability of heterarchic overall socio-political complexity does tend to be higher (see above). For example, in the 19th century the neighbor community (*jamaat*) was spread all over Mountainous Daghestan while by no means all the complex societies based on it were heterarchic ("republics" or "free associations" ["*vol'nye obshchestva*"] of the Russian sources), some of them, a minority however – over twenty *vs.* about ninety, being homoarchic (called *bekstva*, *utsmijstva*, *khanstva* [khanates] and so forth in the Russian narrations) (for general descriptions see, *e.g.*, Magomedov 1947: 366–369; Magometov 1978: 47–48, and, *e.g.*, Bulatova 2003: 203–212, for a case study). To complicate the matter, the more supracommunity levels of socio-political organization in a non-state society rise, the more probable homoarchization of the society as a whole becomes. Again, the Daghestani example is instructive: the unions of heterarchic free associations most often formed as homoarchic, both politically and socially. The largest and most prominent in history free associations unions, Akusha-Dargo and Akhty-Para, were societies just of that sort (*e.g.*, Ikhilov 1967: 94–97; Kaziev and Karpeev 2003: 139–141). The most complex and vast *utsmijstvo* (Kajtag)[77] and *khanstvo* (Kazikumukh) integrated a number of *vol'nye obshchestva*s too (Magometov 1978: 51), although typically (that is

with respect to the other about twenty *bekstva*s, *khanstva*s and the like, on the one hand, and many dozens of free associations, on the other) "by the size of territory the majority of *vol'nye obshchestva*s were not inferior to *khanstva*s and *bekstva*s" (Magomedov 1968: 247). "Big unions of village communities (*i.e.*, *vol'nye obshchestva.* – *D. B.*) were mighty political units at the borders of which the feudal lords' (*i.e.*, *beck*s', *khan*s' and so forth. – *D. B.*) claims for the communalists' land and independence stopped" (Magometov 1978: 57).

Evidently, the further a level of complexity from the substratum, community, one is, the weaker the latter's influence on it turns out (or, to paraphrase, the more complex a society, the weaker the community's influence on its general may become). This reveals itself in invariable encompassment of the community in states and in what we can designate as the possibility of its "ignoring" (in the sense that at the uppermost level[s] they are not so bound to follow the community's homoarchic or heterarchic matrix) in supercomplex non-state societies. However, none of the two prospects was implemented into life in Benin: the state did not form and hence did not encompass the community on the one hand, and the local community's (homoarchic) matrix was not at all ignored at any level of complexity including the uppermost one in the Bini supercomplex non-state society on the other hand.

It is characteristic of societies exhibiting a high degree of Durkheimian mechanical solidarity (Durkheim 1991/1893) that "structurally, one basic unit cannot be distinguished from another. This holds true for the various types of kinship groups as well as for groups that are based on a combination of kinship and territorial units…" (Eisenstadt 1971: 76). But it seems to be more and more difficult to preserve this feature in the course of complexity's growth: usually at the level not higher than of complex chiefdom either the growth stops and even reverses, or the principle of social units' composition changes radically. Only such sophisticated many-tier societies like Benin could preserve similarity of hierarchically arranged social units and elevate to the level equivalent to that of the early state at one time.

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; 2005a). In particular, the early state is homoarchic by the very definition given by the concept's Founding Fathers – Claessen and Skalník (1978b: 640):

> 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.

The homoarchic character of the phenomenon Claessen and Skalnнk designated as "the early state" is also stressed, *e.g.*, in its such heavily criticized but still influential "classical" concepts as those of Elman Service (1971/1962; 1975), Morton Fried (1970/1960; 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. In his recent publication Robert Hommon (2005: 24–26, 28) concludes that the ability to build up "stratified control hierarchies" is a "uniquely human feature" which first revealed itself about 6,000 years ago and which, contrary to actually all the other factors of state formation usually acknowledged, is "essential" to the state's "emergence and functioning". Hence, what follows from our analysis of the 13th – 19th centuries Benin Kingdom is that the homoarchic early state "competes" not only with a variety of complex decentralized heterarchic socio-political systems (for examples see, *e.g.*, contributions in Ehrenreich *et al.* 1995; as well as: Korotayev 1995c; 1996; Thevenot 1996: Ch. 7; Possehl 1998; Schoenfelder 2003[78]) but also with some forms of complex homoarchic socio-political organization. Besides the megacommunity, among homoarchic alternatives to the early state, particularly, the systems based on deeply elaborated rigid cast division (Quigley 1999: 114–169; Kobishchanov 2000: 64), or on transformation of a complex chiefdom into a "supercomplex chiefdom" (Kradin 1992; 2000a; 2000c; 2002b; Kradin *et al.* 2000: 274–310; 2003: 11–14, 50–62, 100–113; Trepavlov 1995; Skrynnikova 1997) can be distinguished. The societies of these (and obviously some other, not mentioned here) types, not being early (archaic) states, were not less complex, not less centralized, and not less homoarchic.

# Afterwards

We all know and remember from school days that the belief in possibility to invent the *perpetuum mobile* is an illusion. Nonetheless, anthropology as a discipline does have it, though a virtual one. The perpetual motive power of anthropological thought from ancient times to anthropology's birth as an academic discipline in the 19th century and up to now is its strive to find the solution to the evident fact that each and every culture reveals features unique to it only, typical of some cluster of cultures (defined geographically or socio-historically), and those spread historically humankind and geographically world-wide. In a nutshell, all the theories ever proposed in anthropology were attempts to solve this or that way just this very problem of specific and general, local and global, temporal and eternal in eventually unique human cultures. However, in my firm belief, no intellectual friction force can stop the motive power of anthropology. It is really perpetual because a human culture, in its formation, existence and disappearance, is influenced and shaped by so many theoretically unclassifiable and even unpredictable factors, and in the end gets a clearly felt but substantially immaterial veil (Frobenius's "*anima*", Kroeber's "style", etc., etc.) that is vitally important for the culture's "final understanding" but definitely and unavoidably remains beyond the essentially rational means of scientific cognition. Hence, all the anthropologists' attempts to find the "final solution" to the phenomenon of human culture(s) can push us closer to the truth but cannot result in actual reaching of this absolute truth of cultural unity and diversity. The mystery of cultures' birth, life, and inevitable death will go on giving rise to new theories and concepts, at least till anthropology remains a social science and does not transform into a sort of narrative art with "I feel" and "I believe" instead of "I demonstrate" and "I prove" as its dominant motive.

By no means so self-confident I am as to claim for providing the final solution to what I regard as the essential problem of social / cultural anthropology as an academic discipline. Furthermore, the theoretical part of the present work is aimed at provoking further thought rather than at solving even the not all-embracing at all (within the theoretical framework of anthropology as a whole) problem of the timeless, that is history-long, basic principles of socio-cultural and political organization. In fact, I see this book mainly as an extensive introduction of the theoretical problem illustrated by the example of the 13th – 19th centuries Benin Kingdom with references to the evidence from a considerable number of other cultures.

Naturally, I did my best to "insert" my ideas in the current debates in anthropology. Particularly, I tried to insert them in that sector of the discipline which is yet not embraced by the post-modernist and similar to it discourses. Although nowadays this sector looks marginal and old-fashioned, and hence those cultivating this field may be seen by many "progressively-minded" colleagues like primitive manual agriculturalists working nearby modern farmers, I aspired for a bed just in that field, however small it is today. On the one hand, I am well aware of the fact that the very kind of problematics the present work deals with is outside the contemporary mainstream in anthropological thought and it is simply not of interest to those this mainstream representing. On the other hand, even much more importantly, within the trends currently dominating, I do not see any room for elaboration of any cross-cultural theory, disregarding its concrete contents and level of generalization. Extreme relativism multiplied by the popular idea of principal impossibility of even reasonably objective vision of another's culture naturally lead to ignoring of one side of the anthropology's dualistic subject – of that of the human cultures' common background and features not to a lesser degree than unilinear evolutionism and rigid positivism of anthropology's pioneers of the 19$^{th}$ century resulted in the overall neglect of cultures and culture areas' specificity.

However, to my mind, there is a crucial difference between the 19$^{th}$ century evolutionism and the late 20$^{th}$ – early 21$^{st}$ centuries postmodernism in anthropology, though they have something in common in a broader context. The commonality they share consists in the fact that both evolutionism and postmodernism are the phenomena which are very far from being merely academic trends, nothing more than some academics' conscious inventions for other academics. They represented or represent the reflections in the academic thought of the way of thinking, typical of the respective historical epochs in general; they may be called "intellectual formations", by analogy with Karl Marx's "socio-economic formations" (not by chance for example, postmodernism is so powerful in contemporary fiction and poetry). In the meantime, the difference between early evolutionism and postmodernism as research paradigms is essential and great. It looks like the former contained the potential for the appearance of all the numerous subsequent theoretical trends in anthropology, including those that were developing as antitheses to it, as attempts to overcome its shortcomings. Postmodernism seems to be the last in this row, the "all-theoretical" intellectual potential of early anthropology was finally exhausted and settled in postmodernism, the theoretical thought has actually transformed into antitheoretical. The way anthropology has passed may be compared with the one of European painting: neither icons nor abstract paintings belong to any genre but all the genres known to the European painting from proto-Renaissance on have been born out of the syncretic (in this sense) icon painting while it is impossible to imagine that the genres could grow out of the abstract art. The same way as the abstractionist art is the death of the very

potential of the genre as an artistic phenomenon, postmodernism is the death of theory in anthropology.

Nevertheless, intellectual formations are definitely historically grounded, and hence not eternal but naturally passing phenomena: they change alongside with the world round us. In this respect the present state of minds reflected in postmodernism by intellectuals and people of the art, is neither better or worse nor blessed with any "history's indulgence" in comparison with, for example, the 19th century evolutionism. It would be useless to try to predict when a new change of epochs will happen, but we may suppose that in anthropology it will be reflected by a return to historicism on the foundations that will suit the discipline's "sacred task" of as deep as possible penetration into, and comprehension of the magic of cultural commonalities and specificities in their spatial and temporal indivisibility much better than the theories and methods known by now.

**NOTES**

[1] A regular army may serve as an ideal image of a generally homoarchic society and a real model of such a community. The rigid vertical division of servicepeople by military ranks is its all-embracing organizational pivot and a pledge of effective functioning; individuals' positions within the institution are replicas of their standings on the only scale of ranks that determines completely the spheres and limits of their obligations, responsibilities and rights. At the same moment, informal horizontal ties relate servicepeople of the same or similar ranks establishing informal secondary hierarchies, for example, by vesting more respect in brave than faint-hearted soldiers, in talented rather than ungifted generals.

[2] For the sake of verity, it must be noted that Olga Artemova elaborates on the point in polemics with strictly materialistic (socio-economic) explanations to the same phenomenon, particularly with the explanation proposed by James Woodburn (1980; 1982; 1988a; 1988b; etc.). However, the evidence from some other "egalitarian" and "non-egalitarian" simple societies not involved in the explanatory schemes by any of the two scholars, for example the Itelmens and Nanais (Goldis) fishers of Eastern Siberia (Krasheninnikov 1949/1972/1756; Lopatin 1922; see also: Sem 1959; Smoliak 1970; Krushanov 1990; Shnirelman 1993; 1994; Orlova 1999; Bulgakova 2001; 2002; Bereznitsky 2003; Volodin 2003), inclines us to sharing the Artemova's interpretation. Her approach in general looks theoretically more realistic and flexible as she does not propose any factor, including religious-ideological, as the one and the only able to determine the socio-political shape of all simple cultures, the other factors being socio-economic and political. According to Artemova, in some cases only one (any) of these factors is actualized and thus shapes a society's socio-political organization completely, while in other cases a combination of the factors is observed.

[3] Throughout this work I employ 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). On universality and the fundamental role of the community from the earliest phases of human social history see, *e.g.*, Murdock and Wilson 1972; Artemova 1983; Kabo 1986; Butinov 2000: 75–93. On the discussion on the point, particularly in the British functionalist and structuralist anthropology and in the Soviet ethnography see, *e.g.*, Bromley 1981: 181–185; Nikishenkov 1986: 133–139; Girenko 2000; Reshetov 2000. In my view, the emphasis on the fact that "autonomous communities" have never been truly autonomous but initially formed parts of wider systems of intercommunity 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 (*vide stricto* Kristiansen 1998 *vs.* Harding 2000; see also, e.g., Blanton and Feinman 1984; Peregrine 1992; Peregrine and Feinman 1996; Algaze 1993; Kradin 2002b). 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 and Korotayev 2000d; Bondarenko 2003b; 2005e: 51–57; 2005f; Bondarenko *et al.* 2003) and hence, as has just been argued, the concept of community still remains valid.

[4] 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 (value system), and ecological milieu, and legitimately builds her concept on these foundations.

[5] In the meantime, I leave apart the problems I feel with Carneiro's specific interpretation concentrated in such "minor linguistic peculiarities" as that I would prefer to speak in the non-unilinear vein about "processes", not "the process" and about "types" as not synonymous with "stages."

[6] As Elizabeth Brumfiel wrote only a dozen years ago (1995: 130), "The coupling of differentiation and hierarchy is so firm in our minds that it takes tremendous intellectual effort to even imagine what differentiation without hierarchy could be". Usually if the very fact of complex heterarchical societies' existence is recognized (as for example, within the wholoculturalist framework), it is considered as an historical accident, anomaly; such cultures are declared incapable to achieve high levels of complexity and internal stability (Tuden and Marshall 1972: 454–456).

[7] Remarkably, in the theory of biological evolution the transition from a more to less hierarchical structure without diminishing of organisms' adaptivity to the environment is not regarded as a sign of degradation or regress (see, *e.g.*, Severtsov 1949; 1967; Futuyma 1997).

[8] The Tasmanians "… separated from the Aborigines of Australia in an early period of their history and then were developing in isolation for a long time" (Kabo 1986: 34), actually, for 8,000 or 9,000 years (Clark, G. and Piggott 1970: 99), so they may legally be regarded as an independent case, at least in general outline. In the respect we are interested in, this is clearly testified by the fact that the Australians' and Tasmanians' overall social non-egalitarianism was based on different backgrounds: religious-ideological (Artemova 1993: 46–54; 2000a: 56–62;

2000b: 133–136; 2004: 162–190) and military-political (Kabo 1975: 147–150; 1986: 31–33) respectively. (By the way, this is one more argument in favor of Artemova's multi-factual (in the worldwide scale) *vs.* Woodburn's mono-factual general explanation to the phenomenon of primitive non-egalitarianism).

[9] The authors of the dual-processual theory could also be blamed for its dichotomic nature as such, what undoubtedly reduces to two the great variety of real strategies known to history. However, as Ingold (1996: 1–2, 5) rightly points out, dichotomy underlies anthropology as a scientific discipline and inevitably reveals itself in theoretical constructions of even those researchers who consciously strive to avoid it and believe that have succeeded in it. The present author also has not avoided (and did not try to avoid) the approach's dichotomy: the idea of heterarchy – homoarchy is dichotomous to the same degree as the dual-processual theory is.

[10] I have described the *process* of Benin Kingdom's formation and transformations in much detail elsewhere (*vide stricto* Bondarenko 2001).

[11] For a recent serious attempt to establish a productive link between archaeology and anthropology on the one hand, and the complexity studies on the other hand, from the standpoint of the current active development of nonlinear approaches in all the respective disciplines, see Beekman and Baden 2005.

[12] For Elman Service, however, the latter characteristic – "the power of force in addition to the power of authority" (1975: 15), or "a monopoly of force" (1978b: 8) was, in fact, the only distinctive feature of the state, particularly as far as bureaucracy, in his opinion, could exist not only in states but also in prestate polities (1975: XIII; see also Service 1971/1962).

[13] The unilinearity of which was in clear and complete contradiction with Darwin's vision of evolution as a process that had no predefined direction. It has become customary to ascribe the unilinearity of pre-Stewardian evolutionism to the influence of Lewis Henry Morgan (Godina 1996) or, even more often, Herbert Spencer (*e.g.*, Goldenweiser 1922: 21–23; Guksch 1985: 14–15; Ingold 1986: 25–26; Claessen 1996a: 213–214; 2000c: 10–13, 49–50, 61–62, 191). This could be so but it should also be noted that this could happen due to unjust simplification of their teachings by subsequent epigones, as those teachings, indeed being unilinear in general, still bore some elements of what was later called structuralism (in the case of Spencer [Carneiro 1973; 1981b; 2003: 30–31; Radcliffe-Brown 2001/1958: 276–294]) and diffusionism (with regards to Morgan [Tokarev 1978: 54–55]). The fact that evolutionism in general and unilinear evolutionism in particular was rooted in the era of anthropology and other social sciences' prehistory – the 16th – 18th centuries (Hodgen 1964: 109–511; Godina 1996; Carneiro 2000a: 167–170; Claessen 2000c: 10–11), shall not be overlooked and underestimated either.

[14] Not occasionally the Marxist historian of American cultural anthropology Yulia Averkieva especially praised Sahlins for his basing at postulating social and specific evolution on "… recognition of the ideas of unity of world history and social progress" (Averkieva 1979: 246). Indeed, Sahlins's "general evolution" is still underpinned by teleological unilinear glance at the humankind's socio-cultural history at which differences between societies and groups of societies ("specific evolution") look like nothing more than local variations of each other, essentially identical (Harris 1968; Ingold 1986: 18–21; Sanderson 1990: 132–133; Claessen 1996a: 214–215;

2000b: 4, 9; 2000c: 49–56, 192; Bondarenko 1997c: 10–11; 1998d: 196; Bondarenko and Korotayev 1999: 129; 2000d: 19; Korotayev 1998a; Korotayev *et al.* 2000: 26–34).

[15] A remarkable reformulation of his previous distinction between "the *decentralized* stratified *society*" and "the *centralized* archaic *state*" (Kristiansen 1991: 19–21; emphases added).

[16] Symptomatically, Kristiansen remarks that "Similar structures may develop in pastoral societies in their interaction with state societies…" (1998: 46) while by today specialists in pastoral cultures had 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 2002b). On the other hand, just those pastoral societies which were not involved into active interaction with autochthonous agricultural (or imposed colonial and postcolonial) states normally remained politically "egalitarian" or "tribal", as specialists (*e.g.*, Irons 1994; Salzman 1999: 35–41; 2004) 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 often not regarded as states; rather they are seen as very complex but nevertheless non-state societies (labeled by Kradin [*e.g.*, 2000a; 2000b: 279–282; 2000c: 296–299; 2002b] 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 1985/1884) the latter notion has been reserved by evolutionists, neoevolutionists, and especially Marxists for complex heterarchic "prestate" societies (*e.g.*, Averkieva 1968; Khazanov 1968; Pershits 1986a; *vide stricto* Kradin 1995: 18–22) 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 appellations 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".

[17] Though numerous co-incidences between modern Western and premodern Chinese bureaucratic machines are really striking, and it was noticed by Weber (see Creel 2001/1970: 13–17).

[18] Claessen accentuates one more aspect of the problem by writing (2005a: 156–157) that though "[i]n all polities… there are found efforts by the central government… to maintain norms, values, rules and regulations, and in order to do so striving to monopolize force – … in practice none ever succeeded in doing so completely."

[19] The Olmecs, Cahokia and Hawai'i are even not infrequently classified as early states (*e.g.*, Coe 1981; O'Brien 1991; Seaton 1978 respectively). For criticism on such an attribution of

the Olmecs and Cahokia, among others, see, *e.g.*, Flannery 1998: 55–57; Spencer and Redmond 2004: 184–187, and Griffin 1983; Muller, J. 1997 (also Beliaev *et al.* 2001) respectively. As for Hawai'i, Earle (1997: 44, 87–89, 132, 138, 202–203; Johnson, A. W. and Earle 2000: 293–294) argues reasonably that the state did appear there but only in the very end of the 18th century, founded by the great paramount Kamehameha I with the help of "western ships, guns, and special personnel" (see also Bondarenko and Korotayev 2003). As for Powhatan, acquaintance with the evidence of just this society led Carneiro (1992: 37; 2000b: 57) to the idea to introduce the category of "consolidated chiefdom" as, in fact, the highest "stage in the evolutionary process by which chiefdoms were moving in the direction of becoming states" (2000: 57); actually, as "almost state" within his openly unilinear classification.

[20] The overwhelming majority of dates provided in the chapters on Benin that follow are conventional. 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 even the majority of dates after that are exact. 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. A reconstruction of the country's history from the earliest times till the late 15th century one can find in another book by the present author (Bondarenko 2001). Accounts of events from the Europeans' appearance till the 18th century and till the kingdom's conquest by the British in 1897 see in Jungwirth 1968 and Ryder 1969 respectively. For a comprehensive account of all the periods from the genesis of the Bini ethnic group and up to the end of Benin's independence, see Roese and Bondarenko 2003. The existence of these books (including those under my authorship) saves me from the necessity to give a systematic account of Benin history in the present work and allows concentrating on anthropological problematics, central to it. The most prominent narrations of the native oral historical tradition that also embraces the whole time of the people's history are those by the mid-20th century royal courtier Jacob Egharevba (1960; 1965; etc.). The book by Bradbury (1957) remains unsurpassed in the field of the Bini historical ethnography though there are also not so few important and reliable historical-ethnographic descriptions made at dawn of the colonial era (Dennett 1906; 1910; Thomas, N. W. 1910a; Talbot 1926; etc.). The most significant contributions to Benin archaeology were made by Graham Connah (1975) and Peter Darling (1984). The reader must also remember that the territory of Benin discussed in the present work once was a part of the British colony of Nigeria succeeded by the independent Federal Republic of Nigeria, and hence, historically, the Benin Kingdom has nothing in common with the contemporary Republic of Benin, previously called Dahomey.

[21] 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; Roese and Bondarenko 2003: 318–331; Bondarenko 1993a: 158–165; 1995a: 231–257; 2001: 212–229; Eweka, E. B. 1992.

[22] The Bini(s) is the biggest but by no means the only Edo-speaking ethnic group (Thomas, N. W. 1910a; Bradbury 1957); the names "Bini(s)" and "Edo" are used as synonyms in some linguistic and ethno-historical publications what is of course inexact (Bondarenko 1998a; 2005c).

[23] This idea found a reflection in one of the sovereign's titles – *obasogie*, meaning, "the *Oba* is greater than a chief" (Omoruyi 1981: 14).

[24] In fact, this argument has an application, much wider than regional: in particular, in archaic and traditional supercomplex societies, including early states, the development of personal ownership of land correlates rather weakly with the political development that might be accompanied by the strengthening of the communal ownership (Bondarenko and Korotayev 2003: 113–116).

[25] On the distinctions between Claessen's and my determination of the state's limits (that give me the right to quote Claessen at this point though the quotation contains the word "state"), see below, in section 2 of chapter 4.

[26] In the cases when a ruler's (at any level of socio-cultural complexity) profane duties clearly overweighed the sacral-religious ones, he had a counterpart who "compensated" it by exercising predominantly sacral power. In Biniland from the mid-1st millennium AD there were two leaders in some local communities: the "sacral" *odionwere* and the "profane", originally military, *onogie* (see Thomas, N. W. 1910a: I, 11–12; Bradbury 1957: 15–17; 1973: 176–179; Bondarenko and Roese 1998; Bondarenko 2001: 55–65).

[27] The author is fully aware of the fact that the Benin power in the time of its territorial expansion does not correspond to the modern academic definitions of the empire (see, *e.g.*, Eisenstadt 1969; Alcock *et al.* 2001). However, I still imply this word in the present work as a tribute to the terminological tradition of the Benin studies (*e.g.*, Sidahome 1964; Stride and Ifeka 1971: 305–320; Maliphant *et al.* 1976; etc.). Actually, the naming of African monarchies "kingdoms", generally accepted from the time of the first European visitors' relations on, is yet not much more meaningful, the nature and socio-political structure of the African and medieval Western polities being compared.

[28] Sigmund Freud (1923/1911: 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".

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

[30] It must be noted that depersonalization of the sovereign was not a granted act but a process related directly to changes in the *Oba*'s role in governing the realm, in the country's historical fortunes. In particular, the tendency toward complete disappearance of portrait features in supreme rulers' depictions to please their status' attributes' stressing became evident in the late 16th century only, that is in time when the *Oba* was finally losing profane power and turning into an all-Benin sacred thing. In full measure this tendency had realized by the mid-18th century (Fagg 1963; Mirimanov 1982: 65–67; 1985: 190–192), also not occasionally concurring with the start of Benin's final sunset. As Barbara Blackmun (1990: 61) testifies, at present the similarity between *Oba*s and their depictions is still unimportant to the Binis. Remarkably, *Oba*s themselves signed the letters to Europeans written in their names not by proper coronation names but by the title (see Salvadorini 1972: 297–300). Depersonalization of titled chiefs was on too but, probably, this process started later than that of *Oba*s' depersonalization, in the 17th or even 18th century only. It

revealed itself in strict prohibition to call chiefs by names, not by titles (Egharevba 1949: 33).

[31] Unfortunately, the evident fact that political culture is a part, revealing, and reflection of a given society's general culture type (pattern) is not so rarely ignored by researchers, especially straightly materialistically-minded. However, the general culture type that varies from one civilization (or culture area, *Kulturkreis* and so forth) to another does determines to a considerable degree the variety of tempos, versions, directions, limits of the socio-cultural evolution. Although culture itself forms under the influence of many circumstances (socio-historical, ecological and so on), the importance of the general culture type for the shaping of a society's socio-cultural image and socio-political organization's characteristics should not be reduced to the so-called "ideological factor" (Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000a; Claessen 2000c). In its turn, the political culture determines the parameters of the ideal socio-political model that forms in people's minds. This way the political culture lays the foundations of the nature, type, form of the society's socio-political evolution, including its revealing in the homoarchic or heterarchic plane. The "non-ideal", real social institutions are an outcome of people's conscious activities (social creative work) to a great extent too, though most often they do not understand (and even do not think of) the socio-political consequences of their actions aimed at the achieving of personal goals. In the meantime, people act in the society correlating their deeds with the value systems they comprehend in their cultures and usually perceive as most natural and exclusively true. Hence, it is clear that a society's both general culture type and political culture are connected intrinsically with the specific features of the so-called "modal personality" characteristic of the given society. These features are transmitted from generation to generation by means of the socialization practices that correspond to the society's conventional value system and can influence significantly the course of political evolution (see Irons 1979: 9–10, 33–35; Ionov 1992: 112–129; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000b: 309–312), though most often the influence in the opposite direction is recognized and emphasized by scholars.

[32] Contrary to supercomplex societies the religious systems of which, especially at the highest complexity level, concentrated on anthropomorphic deities or God (Egypt, Mesopotamia, medieval Europe, the Aztecs, etc., the Islamic world where those called "people of religion" cannot be regarded as priests proper being the most remarkable exception). Though throughout the Bini history there always were priests in communities who performed secondary (to the ancestor) cults (*e.g.*, Nyendael 1705: 447–448; Egharevba 1949: 52; Uwechue 1970: 146–147; Omoruyi 1981: 45; Emovon 1984: 4; for detail see Bondarenko 1995a: 173–175), and at the Kingdom level the people for whom the priestly duties were primary might have existed from 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* at his performance of the high priests' duties (*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 high priest as he, the father of all the country's citizens, performed rites of the cult of royal ancestors, hence, in a specific sense, of all the living Binis' forefathers. (However, it must be noted that one of the changes that accompanied extension of community 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 not so high position in his own kin group).

[33] Actually, what the ancestors could not do, was only to marry the living (Sidahome 1964: 56).

[34] For an 1897 – the year of Benin's fall – description of rituals performed in the palace area, see Bacon 1897: 87–88. A detailed analysis of *eguae* as ritual center is provided by Paula Ben-Amos (1980: 70–93). The more direct political significance of the main shrines' situation in the palace courtyard should not be ignored either: for the *Oba* the performance of major rituals in the *eguae* area was a means of influencing his administrators – titled chiefs (Akpata, A. 1938: 7); one of not so many from the early 17th century on – see this chapter's previous section.

[35] Not by chance in the Bini folk-lore just at the palace gate the road to the sky, by which once upon a time the humans and spirits could walk for visiting each other's domains, began (see Bondarenko 1992b; 1995a: 28).

[36] Characteristically, the Binis saw life in heaven as basically identical to that on earth, with the same community-dominated "social structure" and "administrative system" in which deities with the high god Osanobua stood for the *Oba* and earthly titled chiefs. The center of the world of spirits was imagined as similar in its plan and layout to Benin City: it also "was divided" into wards and craftsmen's compounds, there "were" the palace and a large market in front of it in downtown, and so on and so forth (Gallwey 1938: 5; Sidahome 1964: 118–124, 160–163, 166–172; Talbot 1926, II: 267–268).

[37] For a detailed comparison of Benin under the two dynasties, a description and analysis of the events and processes responsible for the mentioned above reconfiguration, see Bondarenko 2001.

[38] Some other lexemes of the Edo language testify vividly to intimate connection between age and social status, too. For example, "*akegbe* – a man who pretends, by dress or behaviour, to be of a different age or rank" (Melzian 1937: 6), or "*ibie…* – 1) young people. 2) servants" (*Ibid*: 79).

[39] If exceptionally rare occasions of lack of elderly people in an extended family left apart.

[40] In the case when there was only one extended family forming the community, the heads and representatives of its nuclear families became the family and the community council members at one time, and the head of the community and the extended family, *odionmwan*, also coincided in one person. But such communities were exceptions to the rule (Egharevba 1949: 11).

[41] Rare instances of property differentiation in the Bini community can be found only in a few mid-20th century sources – see Egharevba 1949: 74; Sidahome 1964: 128.

[42] Remarkably, there was significant difference between the norms of authority and

property inheritance in the extended family. The family property passed from father to all his sons, though at its sharing the eldest son was to receive more than his younger brothers (Thomas, N. W 1910a: I, 64–89; Ajisafe 1945: 26–27, 34, 95–96, 98–100; Roth 1968/1903: 97; Bradbury 1973: 276–279; Jones 1983: 42). The deceased's brothers, and also sisters by the maternal line, were recognized as legal heirs only if their late brother had left no sons (Talbot 1926: III, 684; Egharevba 1949: 38, 77–78; Bradbury 1957: 15, 30, 46–47; 1964: 155–156; 1965: 98–99; 1973: 157–160; Dapper 1975/1668: 163, 164; Igbafe 1979: 27–28). In any case, the property was to remain in the kin collectivity of the deceased (Egharevba 1949: 39–40 *et al.*).

[43] However, the woman's as if position without any rights in the Bini family is nothing more than an academic myth: her rights, though really subordinating her to male relatives, were nonetheless well-defined and protected by traditions and the common law (Mercier 1962: 279–303; Okojie 1990; 1992; Ahanmisi 1992: 58; Bondarenko 1995a: 140–141; 2001: 98–101). Elderly women who had given birth to many children could be influential in their families, even an *onogie* could be directed informally by his mother (Bradbury 1973: 182). Discrimination of women in Benin, besides natural for a patrilineal society limitations in the spheres of property inheritance (Egharevba 1949: 38, 76; Bradbury 1957: 47) and participation in public life (possible for them only through mail relatives (Smith, W. 1744: 233; Bradbury 1973: 182), mainly came to some ritual prohibitions (see, *e.g.*, Nyendael 1705: 441–443; Dennett 1906: 200–201; Talbot 1926: II, 95, 164; Egharevba 1949: 52; Bradbury 1973: 198; Kuritsyn 1976: 44). In the meantime, indeed, generally speaking, women were socially inferior to men as the Bini society was a essentially male society: its value system was oriented at, and adapted to male psychics, "male ethos" (Kaplan, F. E. S. 1997: 75) reflected in semantics and "ideological task" of Benin fine arts (Wolf 1970) and folk-lore (see Welton 1968: 227; Ogieiriaixi 1971: 31; Emovon 1981: 271–282) which were aimed at imposing the male world outlook and understanding of life on the whole society, and at implantation of "the… ideology of female inferiority and the… concept of female pollution…" (Ahanmisi 1992: 58). As a result, "… the Binis traditionally believe that the overall status of women is inferior to that of the men; *i.e.* there is a culturally legitimated ideology of male dominance" (*Ibid.*: 57).

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

[45] The case of the Iroquois who are remarkable for both their egalitarian political organization and apparently strong kinship ties (Morgan 1851; specifically on this point see also Vorobyov 2000) seem to contradict this (Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000b: 307). Note, however, that the Iroquois have rather a peculiar kinship organization characterized by both matrilinearity and matrilocality. As has been noticed by Divale (1974: 75), matrilocal residence physically disperses men who would form fraternal interest groups, whereas this inhibits the internal warfare which makes it possible for a large non-hierarchical political entity to function successfully in absence of any rigid supracommunity structures.

[46] 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 (1985/1884: 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" (1974/1917: 67). In fact, hardly not the main point of a Marxist social scientist's departure from the camp of "orthodox Marxists" 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 1991d; also see Kubbel 1988: 15; Popov 1990: 51; Koptev 1992: 4; Bondarenko 1998c: 16; 2005b: 81; Kradin 1998: 6–7; Kochakova 1999: 65–66). On the absence of social classes in the Marxist sense in Benin see: Kalous 1970; Kochakova 1986; Bondarenko 1993a.

[47] 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 had happened by the Dark Age time (Andreev 1976: 74–78; Roussel 1976; Frolov 1988: 79–80; on *genos* as not sib, or clan in anthropological terms [Lowie 1920; Ember and Ember 1999: 191, 202, 349, 353; Copet-Rougier 2000] see: Smith, R. C. 1985: 53), in Latium before Rome was founded and royal authority in her established in the 8th century BC (*e.g.*, Dozhdev 2004/2000; see here also criticism on the concept of *gens* as clan), and in Scandinavia by the close of the Bronze Age after the transitory – in this sense – period (from about 2600 BC) 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 (2003a: 163–184; 2003b; 2004: 89–107, 119–137; 2005) has demonstrated convincingly that "deep Christianization" promotes the rise of community (and, in the long run, supracommunity) democracy by crushing the unilineal descent organization (alongside with a number of other potentially democratizing innovations like insistence on monogamy [Korotayev and Bondarenko 2000a; 2000b]). 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 1997a: 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; Barth 1959; 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; Drдger 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.

[48] An aberration of the same kind happens to Testart once again when inflicting heavy criticism on Marxism for its giving in the end economic explanation to any political phenomena (2004: 18–20), he himself eventually arrives at pushing to the foreground the political-economic factors of state formation (2004: 117–125). In his most recent book (2005) Testart spreads his basically politico-economic view on the whole scope of human cultures making differences just in this sphere the background for societies' classification.

[49] Just because The Early State concept treats the phenomenon of the state wider than I do, it postulates that solution to most complicated problems societies used to face, could be found (if could be found at all) inevitably by means of state's creation (Claessen 2000a; 2002). Actually, this argument, really inevitably, leads to consideration as states of the societies I would rather treat as alternatives to the state (see section 1 of chapter II).

[50] In particular, Claessen (1978: 593) attributes as "transitional" the following societies from the "The Early State" sample: China (late 2nd – early 1st millennia BC), Maurya (4th – 2nd centuries BC), France (10th – 11th centuries), Aztecs (15th – 16th centuries), Kuba (19th century), and Jimma (19th – 20th centuries [till 1932]). In the post-1978 publications Claessen has characterized as "transitional early states" African Congo (17th century), Dahomey (17th – 19th centuries), and Asante (late 17th – 19th centuries) (see Claessen 2005a: 152). Tymowski (1987: 59) adds one more African society, Songhay (15th – 16th centuries) to the roster.

[51] In the "The Early State" sample (Claessen 1978: 593) the limited state (the "typical early state" in Claessen and Skalnнk's thesaurus) is represented by Egypt (1st half of the 1st millennium BC), Scythia (6th – 3rd centuries BC), Iberia (6th century BC – 1st century AD), 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, Claessen (1985: 203–209, 213) later added the Carolingian state (8th – 10th centuries), while the Mycenaean Greek states of the 16th – 12th centuries BC and the Polish state of the 9th – 11th centuries AD were added by Vliet (1987: 78) and Tymowski (1996) respectively.

[52] In "The Early State" (Claessen 1978: 593) the societies defined as "inchoate early states" formed the list as follows: Norway (10th – 11th centuries), Volta (15th – 19th centuries), Ankole (17th – 19th centuries), Tahiti (18th century), Hawai'i (18th – early 19th centuries), Zande (18th – 19th centuries).

[53] According to the historical tradition of the Bini, the seat of the all-polity government was transferred to Benin City from the settlement of Ugbekun by the second *Ogiso* Ere and remained there forever. Before that Benin City had been called Igodomigodo and Ere changed the name for Ile ("House"); the city bore this name till the beginning of the *Oba* dynasty's time (Egharevba 1952: 16; 1956: 3; 1964: 8; Aisien 1995: 58–60; Akenzua, C. A. 1994–1997: II, 1). Indeed, a specific feature of the Benin polity in the First dynasty period (though not a sign of its uniqueness – compare, *e.g.*, with the South-East Asian Khmers of the 3rd – 5th centuries AD [Rebrikova 1987: 163–164]) was that at one and the same moment it had a "floating" power center (as different chiefdoms were changing each other in this capacity) and the exceptionally stable political and ideological (including ritual) center – the city of Benin. In the Bini's sociocentric picture of the universe Benin City acquired the exclusive place of its center, not far from which, as they believed, the solid land and first people had appeared by the will of the supreme deity Osanobua (or Osa), and where the worlds of humans and their deceased ancestors were coming into contact with each other (Melzian 1937: 148; Ighodaro 1967–1968; Ebohon 1972: 5; Dapper 1975/1668: 164; Eweka, E. B. 1992: 2–4; Akenzua, C. A. 1994–1997: II, 4; Isaacs, D and Isaacs, E. 1994: 7–9; Aisien 1995: 85; Ugowe 1997: 1; Eweka, I. 1998: 1–35). Precisely the fact that Benin City was the point of political and socio-cultural attraction for all the Bini within the *Ogiso*s' domain prevented the triumph of the centrifugal tendencies over centripetal and hence ceased the fragmentation of the fragile and in many respects "scrappy" polity.

[54] During the *Ogiso* period the heads of the city communities formed a chiefdom council similar to the communal one. It looks plausible that those heads were five of the later hereditary *Uzama N'Ihinron* chiefs (Ikime 1980: 110; Isichei 1983: 136; Bondarenko 2001: 112–117).

[55] There really are reasons to think so: It should not be ruled out that the proto-Benin City chiefdom's name was Idumivbioto or Uhunmwunidunmwun – "the premier settlement" (Aisien 1995: 58–59; see also Akenzua, C. A. 1994–1997: II, 1). Up till now this is the name of what appears to be the oldest city district in its modern western part, on the right bank of the Ikpoba River. On old city maps it is indicated as Humudum Village. Other villages which formed the proto-Benin City chiefdom were situated in chain along the river banks. At first the settlements of the same as Ihunmwunidunmwun right bank of the Ikpoba were integrated: Ihinmwinrin, Avbiama, Idogbo, Evbiakagba, and Okhorhor. Later some villages from the left bank were integrated into the chiefdom too: Utee, Orhior, Oregbeni, Ogbeson, and Emuhu (Aisien 1995: 59–60). The Bini themselves believe that Benin City like other pre-Second Dynasty settlements, is *evb'uwenrhien*, that is "… a town which was magically brought into being by an allegorical founder through the process of instant wish – actualization" (Aisien 1995: 58). In the meantime, another oral tradition that tells about 31 villages Benin City as if comprised in the First dynasty time (Omoregie, O. S. B. 1990: 118) is definitely unauthentic: firstly, this relation finds no archaeological or ethnographic proofs while, and this is secondly, 31 is a popular Binis' sacral number that often stands for simply

"many" (compare, for example, with the traditional figure of the *Ogiso* rulers – also 31, although it is clear that this figure is not precise [Bondarenko 2001: 83]).

[56] Thus, the traditional general names, the "*Ogiso* dynasty" or the "First dynasty", are actually historically incorrect though they are routinely used in Benin historiography due to the tradition, just the same way as the name "empire" with regards to Benin of the 15th – 19th centuries (see above).

[57] Although in reality this could well be another way round – see Bondarenko 2001: 191–193.

[58] For detailed ethnohistorical and ethnographic descriptions of the Bini agriculture see Egharevba 1949: 67–70; Bradbury 1957: 23–25; 1973: 154; Roese and Rees 1994: 543–545.

[59] Just its stability allows extrapolating of the ethnographic evidence on the community on earlier periods of the people's socio-political history with a rather high degree of certainty. This was specifically emphasized by Bradbury (1964), the most outstanding student of Benin ethnography and history.

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

[61] Thus at this level of analysis it is incorrect to equate the Sumerian *ù* and Akkadian *botum* 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 BC 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: I, 57–72).

[62] Characteristically, Dmitri Dozhdev, criticizing the traditional, that is in light of the sib/clan theory, glance at institutional evolution of early Rome, writes in introduction to his article (2004/2000: 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.

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

[64] 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).

[65] Crafts in villages have always been completely subordinated to the organization of agricultural production and has not demanded the existence of any specific craft unit.

[66] On the distinguishing between the family and community ancestors by the Binis see Roese and Bondarenko 2003: 42–43.

[67] The oral tradition refers the appearance of the first "craft guilds" to a much more distant time by attributing their establishment to the second *Ogiso* Ere (Egharevba 1960: 2).

[68] On these premises many universalistically, or better to say excessively Eurocentricly, thinking scholars refuse to recognize Benin City as a "true" city (see Bondarenko 1995a: 97–98). Contrary to this viewpoint, I regard as more productive the ideas of Braudel (1986–1992/1969–1979: I, 537–539) and especially of Eisenstadt and Shacher (1987) who wrote about the variety of civilizational types of the city. Its specificity in precolonial Africa consisted in indivisibility of the city from the village and impossibility to be even imagined outside the community organization framework (Bondarenko 1997c: 46–56). The autochthonous African city, including Benin City, and the village should be discussed as not opposing each other but rather mutually complementary (Bondarenko 1995a: 97–98; 1996e). Ancient and medieval European cities were also tightly connected with agriculture but while there the cities were based on the nuclear family (neighbor) communities and individualized plough agriculture, in Africa, including Benin, the socio-economic background was formed by the extended family communities and collective hoe agriculture.

[69] As well as conditionality of the very singling out of subsystems in an archaic culture, including African (see, *e.g.*, Crawley 1953/1902; Uya 1984: 2; Romanov 1991: 65–66; Bondarenko 1993b: 185; 1995a: 20–23, 278).

[70] The only exception is South America for which an extremely weak positive correlation between the size of the family and the community organization's heterarchy was attested (Phi = 0.02).

[71] It is noteworthy that among other, non-human, primates the role of kinship ties is also higher in homoarchically than heterarchically organized associations (Thierry 1990; Butovskaya 1993; 1994: 14–16, 45; 2000; Butovskaya and Fajnberg 1993: 25–90).

[72] In his review of the second edition of Murray's *Early Greece* (1993) Karpjuk (1994: 193,194) points out that "in the author's opinion, the reason for the appearance of tyrannical regimes in Archaic Greece was the *demos*' need in leaders for the struggle with aristocracy, who due to this acquired such great importance in this transitional period", and then remarks that "Murray's viewpoint on the reasons of appearance and social roots of tyranny is quite traditional."

[73] Note that Grinin's attempt to avoid professional full-time administration as a state's feature *sine qua non* disavows his own definition of the state given elsewhere (1997: 20; 2000b: 190) in which this point is present.

[74] To what the appearance of linear dialectics just in ancient Greece is the best testimony.

[75] On the evolution during the 20th century of Benin students' views on the extent of the *Oba*'s power from recognition of the *Oba* as a "despot" in the direction of the position represented in this book (and other publications of the present author) and on this position's being grounded in the sources, see Bondarenko 1991a.

[76] This prestate legacy is especially vivid just in the political philosophy of Confucius in which a state is likened to a clan.

[77] A part of the Kajtag *utsmijstvo*'s territory lay not in the mountains but in the flat country.

[78] Hence, instead of arguing that "… to abandon 'centralization' as the core feature of neo-evolutionary theory is to dismiss most of today's neo-evolutionary literature…" (Vansina 1999: 172), by the closing years of the last millennium it would have been much more correct to argue that this could mean inflicting heavy criticism on most (till the mid-1980s nearly all) relatively recent but already "yesterday's" neo-evolutionary literature.

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