SLAVES, TRADE, AND TAXES: THE MATERIAL BASIS OF POLITICAL POWER IN PRECOLONIAL WEST AFRICA*

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The role of trade generally and the slave trade in particular . . . has been grossly exaggerated. . . . The basic ingredients of power were land and taxable peasants (Ajayi and Smith 1971, pp.124–125).

Directly or indirectly, trade seems to have been an important source of state income, particularly since 'feudal' rents derived from land were far less common in Africa than in medieval Europe (Hopkins 1973; p. 62).

Les couches privilégiées détournent à leur profit une partie du produit des villageois . . . L'impôt *en nature* . . . est, *en Afrique*, le mode le plus usuel (Suret-Canale 1969, p. 114).

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> Le despote africain exploitait moins ses sujets que les tribus limitrophes: c'est en effet des échanges à longue distance que provenait la majeure partie du surproduit (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1969, p. 71).

This article is an attempt to explore the question of the material basis of political power in precolonial West Africa: in more concrete terms, to determine the sources from which the rulers of the states of precolonial West Africa drew their income. Despite its obvious importance for the understanding of West African history, this subject has not so far attracted very much detailed study[1] and, as the foregoing quotations illustrate, there has been considerable disagreement even over such basic issues as the relative importance of agriculture and trade as sources of state revenues. Lacking more detailed research, any conclusions must be tentative; but the simple, if laborious, process of collating the fragmentary information on the topic scattered through available monographs does appear to yield a clear enough pattern.

EXPENDITURE

Before proceeding to an examination of what is known of the sources of income of West African rulers, it is helpful to consider briefly the question: for what did West African rulers need income? I would suggest that three broad areas of essential expenditure can be distinguished: (1) The existence of a state, and more particularly of a powerful state with an effective administrative system, implies the existence of a large court establishment which was not directly productive. Effective political power depended above all on men—officials who could ensure that national policy was executed, soldiers who could police the state and defend it against its enemies. Since administration and war tended to become increasingly specialized occupations, these officials and soldiers could no longer engage in farming to produce their own food. Where (as in the savannah areas of West Africa) the army included an important element of cavalry, it was also necessary to secure supplies of fodder for the horses. (2) However, while the court establishment had first of all to be fed, this in itself was not enough. The king and his court expected to enjoy a visibly higher standard of life than the rest of the population; and arguably, they also *needed* to do so, for purposes of prestige. The king's ability to offer such a higher standard of life to his courtiers also enabled him to reward loyal followers and to seduce potential troublemakers. For this purpose, the ruler required a supply of luxury goods—often, though not always, obtained from external sources—expensive cloths, beads, tobacco, alcohol, and so forth. The need for such conspicuous consumption might be mitigated in militantly Islamic states, where an ideology of asceticism was adopted,[2] but in general the distribution of luxury goods by the king represented a very considerable area of state expenditure. (3) There were also certain goods that were of direct relevance to political power—military supplies, above all horses in the savannah areas, and firearms in the coastal areas.[3] These, like the luxury goods, were generally obtained through trade, though horses were bred locally in certain parts of West Africa and some states seem to have adopted a deliberate policy of encouraging local horse breeding in order to make themselves independent of external sources.[4]

It can thus already be seen that it is to some extent misleading to confront agriculture and trade as alternative candidates for the title of the "real" basis of political power: both foodstuffs and trade goods were essential.

LAND

It is also necessary at the beginning to dispose, briefly, of one red herring. Ajayi and Smith, in the first passage quoted above, write of "land and taxable peasants" as the real ingredients of political power, as opposed to commerce. This use of the term "land" is, however, very misleading. It is a commonplace to observe that the tenure of land in precolonial Africa was normally collective, vested in village or kin groups. Even in Muslim areas of tropical Africa, the Islamic system of individual land tenure was seldom adopted (Lewis 1966, p. 49). It is usually suggested that the reason for this lack of individualization of land rights was the relative abundance of land: land not being a scarce resource, it had little or no commercial value, and there was, therefore, no point in defining rights to land closely (e.g., Goody 1971, pp. 24–29; Hopkins 1973, p. 38). This explanation is not altogether convincing, since even where land is relatively abundant a scarcity of it can be created artificially by political action, as was done by European colonial governments in some parts of Africa during the twentieth century (see Hymer 1970, p. 34). However, it remains clear that in precolonial West African conditions neither wealth nor political power could be based upon land as such. The scarce resource in agricultural production was not land, but labour. A rich man therefore invested his wealth not in land, but in people—by acquiring large numbers of wives, or by purchasing large numbers of slaves. As Hopkins observes, "Africans measured wealth and power in men rather than in acres; those who exercised authority were man-owners rather than landowners" (Hopkins, 1973, p. 26). It is therefore necessary to amend Ajayi and Smith's formulation, and to speak of *farm-slaves* and "taxable peasants" as being (possibly) more important than commerce as a source of state revenues.

STATE REVENUES

Consideration of the revenues of West African rulers is more difficult than it ought to be, since much of the ethnographical and historical literature is vague and uninformative on this point. Comprehensive surveys of the major sources of state revenues are disappointingly rare.[5] It is convenient to consider the major sources of revenue of West African rulers under two heads: I will first deal with "state enterprise," direct participation by rulers in production or in commerce; and then with the systems of taxation, both of production and of commerce, operated by them. This cuts across the dichotomy of agriculture/trade so far implied, but I shall return to this point in my conclusion.

State Enterprise: Production

African rulers and their officials regularly had their own farms, which produced the foodstuffs (or much of them) needed for themselves and their retainers. Chiefly and royal farms might be cultivated in part by *corvée*—labour service from the rest of the population: this was reportedly the case with the royal farms of the coastal kingdom of Whydah in the early eighteenth century (Labat 1730, vol. 2, pp. 98–100). But more often these farms were cultivated by slaves. The existence of slave villages growing food for the central government is recorded for the Songhay empire in the sixteenth century, and is doubtless much older (Levtzion 1973, pp. 117–118). Nineteenth century evidence is abundant. In Sokoto, the "estates" granted to support officials included "land farmed by slaves" (Last 1967, pp. 102–103), and "settlements of royal slaves" were also an important source of income in Zaria, one of the emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate (Smith 1960, p. 92). In another of the Sokoto emirates, Bida (Nupe), these slave settlements, here known as *tungazi,* have been the subject of a detailed study by Mason: their primary function, it is said, was "to produce the food and fodder which sustained the large and often unproductive population of the capital" (Mason 1973, p. 464). Slave farms established by the chiefs are also reported from nineteenth century Bornu, where they were called *kaliari* (Brenner 1973, p. 110), and the labour of "state slaves" was an important source of income for the rulers of Masina (Johnson 1976, p. 486). It has been suggested that the settlement of slaves in independent villages, or plantations, was characteristic of the savannah areas of West Africa, rather than of the forest (Meillassoux 1971, pp. 63–64), but this seems to be incorrect. In the forest area, we are told that in Benin chiefly "wealth was invested mainly in buying slaves, who were set down in villages to farm for their masters" (Bradbury 1967, p. 17). There is also a great deal of information on the royal slave plantations of the kingdom of Dahomey (Le Herissé 1911, pp. 52, 90): here as early as the 1720s the king reportedly "had great numbers of captive Negroes, which tilled his Grounds, and did other Work" (Snelgrave 1734, p. 106). Another clear example of the existence on a large scale of slave plantations growing foodstuffs for the principal chiefs is in the coastal city-state of Old Calabar, though here the establishment of such plantations appears to have been an innovation of the early nineteenth century (Latham 1973, pp. 91–96).

The functions of these farm slaves were largely restricted to producing foodstuffs for the officials, rather than producing commodities for exchange (see Hopkins 1973, p. 24). The main reason for this was that there was only a very limited market for the basic foodstuffs which they grew. Even in early times, it is true, foodstuffs could be sold to the large urban centres, such as Timbuktu, and to trading caravans, and there were some cash-crops of considerable importance—above all, kola nuts and cotton. It is not clear whether West African rulers employed their farm slaves to grow these crops, though it is likely that they did. Opportunities for cash-crop production by slave plantations were substantially increased, however, with the growth of "legitimate commerce" in vegetable oils between West Africa and Europe during the nineteenth century, and at least some West African rulers responded to these new opportunities. Mason notes that the *tungazi,* the slave farms of Nupe, made payments in money (cowry shells) as well as in kind to the Nupe chiefs, and suggests that they were responsible for a large part of the production of shea-butter oil for sale to the European traders on the River Niger (Mason 1973, pp. 465–466). The royal plantations of Dahomey were likewise adapted and expanded during the latter half of the nineteenth century to produce palm oil for export (Le Herissé 1911, p. 90).

Besides agriculture, one very profitable field for state enterprise was mining. It does not appear that the rulers of the early empires of the Western Sudan were directly involved in the mining of gold (Levtzion 1973, p. 116), but this was certainly the case later in the Akan states of the forest. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Fernandes reported of the Akan area: "The kings have slaves, whom they put into the mines" (Quoted by Wilks 1976, pp. 427–428). It is also known that the kings of Asante, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, engaged in state mining of gold, employing slave labour (Wilks 1975, pp. 435–436). There was also the possibility of employing state hunters to produce ivory for export: such teams of royal ivory hunters are attested in Asante (Wilks 1975, p. 435) and in Dahomey (Forbes 1851, vol. 1, pp. 157–158).

However, the most common form of state-controlled production for the market was the "production," or rather the gathering, of slaves. It is probable that the great majority of slaves in West Africa, whether exported or used for domestic purposes, were acquired by capture in war. Precise statistical evidence on this point is lacking, but of one small nineteenth century sample of slaves, 34 percent were war captives and 30 percent were said to have been "kidnapped"—the latter category probably including many taken in slave-raids as well as those who fell victim to small-scale kidnappings.[6] The operations which led to the capture of these slaves were under the control of the kings and chiefs, who controlled the armies of the various states, and in the division of booty slaves appear to have been normally reserved for the chiefs. Warfare in precolonial West Africa was a business enterprise, as Forbes acutely observed of Dahomey in 1850: "...war in Dahomey is a trade, and each soldier is a trader, the annual slave hunt forming the market. A price is set on each prisoner and each head, and the soldier is constrained to sell to his lawful master. As the king has about 2,000 males and 5,000 amazons [sic, in the army], together with those male soldiers contributed to the hunt by each town and district, he necessarily becomes a very extensive slave-procurer, at the risk, of course, of his own slaves [i.e., those in the army], and at the expense of their keep, and the trifling percentage at which he purchases them." (Forbes 1851, vol. 2, pp. 90–91). In Dahomey, indeed, the king is said to have had a monopoly of the slaves captured by the Dahomian army (Le Herissé 1911, p. 52), though there is some suggestion that in fact he received only the slaves taken by his own (very large) private army, those captured by the nonroyal contingents going to the chiefs who contributed them (Duncan 1847, vol. 2, p. 264). There was apparently a royal monopoly of war captives also in the southern Akan kingdoms (Daaku 1970, p. 32).

State Enterprise: Trade

While there is no doubt that some West African rulers were directly involved in the production of key export commodities—slaves, gold, ivory, and palm oil—it is uncertain how far state enterprise extended into the marketing of trade goods. It has commonly been asserted that whereas in the savannah areas of West Africa trade was left to private enterprise, in most or all of the Guinea kingdoms external trade, or at least the Atlantic slave trade, was a royal monopoly (Oliver and Fage 1970, p. 109; Goody 1971, p. 51; Levtzion 1973, pp. 112–113; Hopkins 1973, p. 106). The operation of such a state monopoly of commerce is, moreover, a central feature of Polanyi's influential model of an "archaic economy," which is based upon the coastal kingdom of Dahomey (Polanyi 1966, esp. p. 94). However, the existence of these royal commercial monopolies in the Guinea states is very difficult to substantiate.

In the southern Akan kingdoms, as Daaku has shown, there was never any royal or chiefly monopoly of commerce (Daaku 1970, pp. 32–34; 1971, pp. 170–172). The situation in the hinterland kingdom of Asante is less clear. There was certainly in Asante a body of official royal traders, the *batafo*. Fynn asserts that during the eighteenth century, trade in gold, ivory, kola nuts, and slaves was "largely a state enterprise," controlled by the *batafo* (Fynn 1971, pp. 117, 120), while Wilks similarly claims that during most of the nineteenth century the *batafo* "enjoyed all but toal protection from any form of competition" (Wilks 1975, p. 689). Detailed accounts of the operations of the *batafo* seem to indicate that they enjoyed privileges which gave them a considerable competitive advantage, but not anything describable as a monopoly: for example, it is recorded that the king of Asante used to ban others from trading in kola until his own traders had sold their kolas in the early market—a practice which evidently implies the existence of other traders in addition to the *batafo* (Fynn 1971, p. 35; Wilks, 1975, p. 268). It does seem clear, however, that the *batafo* were engaged not only in marketing the king's own slaves and the produce of his farms, but also in purchasing goods for re-sale at a profit, operating with capital (gold) issued from the royal treasury.[7]

In the case of the Aja kingdoms to the east of the Akan country, we likewise hear for the most part of various commercial privileges enjoyed by the king which fell far short of monopoly. In the kingdom of Whydah, for example, European traders had to purchase the king's stock of slaves before they could buy from anyone else, and had to pay higher prices to the king than to the others (Bosman 1705, p. 363). In 1718 the king of Whydah, Huffon, did attempt to establish a monopoly of the slave trade: he appointed a "Caboceer" (chief), and ruled that "all slaves come into this Cabr's hands who may dispose of them to whom he had a mind" (Akinjogbin 1967, pp. 51–52). But this did not last: the monopoly hit at the interests of the interior countries which supplied slaves through Whydah, and one of these, Dahomey, responded to this threat to freedom of trade by invading and conquering Whydah in 1727 (Snelgrave 1734, pp. 5–6). Dahomey itself is often presented as the classic instance of a royal monopoly of the slave trade (Akinjogbin 1967, p. 103; Lombard 1967, p. 90; Polanyi 1966, p. 94), but this is quite without foundation. The classic ethnographic study of Dahomey, that of Le Herissé (1911), does not claim that the king exercised a monopoly of the slave trade: only that he had a monopoly of the disposal of *war captives*, while the slaves imported into Dahomey from other states for local use or for re-sale to the Europeans were handled by independent merchants (pp. 52–53). The contemporary evidence corroborates this. It was said of Agaja, the king of Dahomey in the 1720s, that "he drives no regular Trade in Slaves, but only sells such as he takes in his Wars" (Snelgrave 1734, p. 125), and later evidence shows that the king's agents at the coast marketed only his war captives, while slaves from the other countries in the interior were disposed of by other merchants (Pruneau de Pommegorge 1789, p. 208). In Dahomey, as in Whydah, the king enjoyed various trading privileges—European merchants had to buy his slaves first, at higher prices (Le Herissé 1911, p. 89), and he had a monopoly of the purchase of certain imports, notably firearms, gunpowder, iron, and coral (Dalzel 1793, p. 208, note)—but the existence of these privileges of course (though this is sometimes overlooked) implies the existence of other traders besides the king. In Dahomey, as in Whydah, there was also an abortive attempt at a royal monopoly of the slave trade. In the 1780s king Kpengla "was resolved to try the effect of a monopoly in trade," and set about buying up slaves at fixed (low) prices, for re-sale to the Europeans; when the African merchants proved reluctant to sell their slaves to him, Kpengla resorted to compulsory purchase (Dalzel 1793, pp. 213–214). However, this caused considerable unrest among the Dahomian merchants, and when Kpengla died in 1789 his successor "redressed the grievances of the traders, by removing the oppressive restrictions which had been laid upon them by his father," declaring that "they should be allowed full liberty to trade" (pp. 223–224). Later evidence confirms that private merchants continued to operate in Dahomey alongside the king's official agents (e.g. Forbes 1851, vol. 1, pp. 112–113).

Perhaps the most plausible case for a royal commercial monopoly can be made with regard to Benin. Unfortunately, Alan Ryder in his study of Benin is irritatingly reticent about the precise degree of control which the king exercised over trade. However, he seems to imply that through the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries European merchants in Benin could trade directly only with palace officials, usually referred to as *fiadors* (factors), though for a time at least in the early eighteenth century there appears alongside the official *fiadors* a group of brokers *(mercadors)* apparently handling "unofficial" trade (Ryder 1969, p. 92, 130). In this later period, the king and his officials enjoyed rights of preemption, like those in Asante and Dahomey (p. 184). There are also references to the king enjoying monopolies of the export of specific commodities—pepper in the sixteenth century (p. 79, 339), male slaves in the early eighteenth century (p. 168, note 2; p. 334), palm kernels and gum copal in the late nineteenth century (p. 277). These references imply, of course, that trade in other commodities was not so restricted. It is not clear, however, whether the king bought up supplies of these commodities for resale to the Europeans, or simply prevented anyone else from selling them.

One clear case of a royal monopoly in the marketing of a commodity comes, curiously, not from the coast but from the interior state of Nupe, where kola-nut growers were forbidden to sell their crops except to the king's agents (Nadel 1942, p. 90). However, in the present state of the evidence, it seems reasonable to suppose that the rulers of West African states normally contented themselves with marketing their own produce, and did not attempt to drive out the private merchants.

Taxation

Taxation is conveniently divided into indirect taxation, or taxation of trade, and direct taxation.

Taxation of commerce was undoubtedly very common, and very ancient, in West Africa. Evidence goes back to the eleventh century, when al-Bakri reports the import and export duties on salt and gold levied by the king of Ghana (Levtzion 1973, p. 115). There is considerable evidence, especially for the coastal areas, from European sources. These sources may well, indeed, give an exaggerated impression of the importance of taxes on trade, since for such foreign visitors taxes on trade were obviously visible in a way in which direct taxation was not. However, their evidence does serve to demonstrate that taxes were regularly imposed on goods travelling along roads, goods entering and/or leaving towns, and goods sold in markets—these were often *ad valorem* taxes, and usually paid in money (cowry shells or gold) rather than in kind.[8] At the coastal ports, additional (and substantial) taxes were regularly imposed on European traders, in return for permission to trade—it was these payments which were known as "customs." The king of Whydah, for example, received from each ship goods to the value of £100 as customs, in addition to a duty of $1 on each slave exported (Bosman 1705, pp. 362–363); while the king of Dahomey received customs which in the 1800s amounted to goods to the value of between 7 and 21 slaves, according to the size of the ship[6] (McLeod 1820, pp. 10–11), as well as a proportion of all rum imported and a duty of one musket and some gunpowder on each slave exported (Le Herissé 1911, p. 89). According to Daaku, taxes were not levied on the trade routes in the southern Akan kingdoms (1971, pp. 175–176). If this is so, this was an exceptional case: there were certainly road taxes in the hinterland state of Asante (Wilks 1975, p. 34).

It is not clear whether taxes on trade were equally important in the Sudan areas of West Africa. Here, the situation was complicated by Islamic prejudices against the levying of taxes on commerce. In Hausaland, for example, ᶜUthman dan Fodio denounced the levying of taxes on merchants and on sales in the markets as an infidel abuse.[9] However, it does not appear that taxes on trade disappeared even after ᶜUthman's *jihad* in 1804. In the case of Zaria, one of the emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate founded by ᶜUthman, it is said that the initial effect of the *jihad* was to remove uncanonical taxes, but that later a variety of illegal taxes—including caravan and market dues—were introduced (Smith 1960, pp. 93–94). A tax on merchants (called *ᶜushr*) was also levied in other nineteenth century theocratic states, including Masina (Johnson 1976, p. 487) and the Tukolor empire of al-Hajj ᶜUmar (Oloruntimehin 1972, pp. 176–177).

The capacity of a state to collect direct taxes from its citizens doubtless varied with the size and efficiency of the administrative machinery at the disposal of the ruler. In some cases, it may be that taxes on trade were more important than direct taxes simply because they were easier to collect—agents needed only to be placed at market places or at town gates, or along a few well-frequented roads, rather than having to be sent to every compound or farm. However, direct taxation was certainly widespread in West Africa, taxes being imposed sometimes at a fixed rate and sometimes in proportion to wealth or income. Direct taxes seem to have been especially important, or at any rate are better documented, in the Sudan areas of West Africa. In the Sokoto Caliphate, for example, the principal taxes levied were the *zakat*, a tithe of agricultural produce, and the *kharaj*, in theory a tax payable by non-Muslims but in practice an additional land tax paid by most farmers (Last 1967, pp. 103–104; Johnston 1967, pp. 172–173). The *zakat* and the *kharaj* are canonical Islamic taxes, and they also formed the main source of revenue in other nineteenth century theocratic states, such as Masina (Johnson 1976, pp. 486–487) and the empire of al-Hajj ᶜUmar (Oloruntimehin 1972, pp. 176–177). In Bornu, there was similarly the *sadaga*, a tithe of agricultural produce, and the *binumran*, a tax paid collectively by each village (Brenner 1973, pp. 109–110). Direct taxation is also attested to in some of the Guinea kingdoms. In Dahomey, there was a tax on agricultural produce, called the *kouzou*, and a poll tax paid by each family head, the *amlou'koue* (Le Herissé 1911, pp. 83–84); while a poll tax is also recorded in Asante (Wilks 1975, pp. 70, 433).

Direct taxation was not restricted to those of the population engaged in agriculture. In the savannah areas, the nomadic Fulani regularly paid a cattle tax, called in Hausa *jangali*.[10] Gold mining was also taxed: in ancient Ghana, all gold nuggets found in the kingdom had to be surrendered to the king (Levtzion 1973, pp. 115–116); while in the Akan states the king took not only all nuggets but also a large share of the gold dust produced (Daaku 1971, p. 172; Wilks 1967, p. 217). Hunters were likewise often required to pay part of their takings to the ruler: this tax yielded not only meat and hides, but also ivory.[11] In some states, such as the Sokoto Caliphate, there were also special taxes on craftsmen, who were obliged to send the ruler samples of their manufactures (Smith 1960, pp. 154, 341).

Another very common form of direct taxation was a death duty, or inheritance tax, usually aimed especially at important chiefs. Taxes on inheritance are attested to, for example, in the Sokoto Caliphate, in Asante, in Dahomey, and in the Yoruba kingdoms.[12] There were also, of course, the tributes levied from dependent communities outside the central area of the state.

It may seem reasonable to oppose, as do Ajayi and Smith, direct taxation to trade, on the assumption that the former represented primarily taxation of agricultural production. Detailed study, however, shows that this is misleading. A very significant proportion of direct taxation appears to have been paid, not in agricultural produce, but in trade goods (whether of local or European provenance) and in money (cowries or gold). There were, of course, the taxes on gold and ivory production, but in addition to these it appears that much of the taxation paid by ordinary farmers was not rendered in kind. Certainty on this point is, unfortunately, frequently difficult, since the ethnographic and historical data are often vague: it is sometimes stated what tax was paid *on*, but not what it was paid *in*. For example, it might be assumed that the cattle tax *(jangali)* was paid in cattle, and some accounts speak of a rate of one out of every ten head of cattle;[13] but in at least one instance, that of Abuja, the cattle tax was apparently paid in money, at a rate of 10,000 cowries per head of cattle (Hassan and Shuaibu 1952, p. 79). In some cases, there may have been a geographical distinction between areas paying their direct taxes in kind and those paying in trade goods: in Benin, for example, it is said that villages in the Benin kingdom proper paid tribute in yams, palm oil, and other foodstuffs, while "the more remote vassal chiefs sent slaves and livestock" (Bradbury 1907, p. 10). In many cases, however, there seems to have been a general desire for taxes to be paid in money or trade goods. In Asante, for example, "tribute was wherever possible paid in gold . . . areas without resources of gold were required to produce cloth, livestock, or slaves"; the poll tax levied in the capital was likewise paid in gold, and the inheritance tax fell "principally on assets in gold" (Wilks 1967, pp. 215–216; 1975, pp. 70, 433, 697–698). Similarly in Dahomey, the poll tax and the inheritance tax were paid in cowries, and the tax on agricultural produce (the *kouzou*) appears to have been of less importance until it could be applied to palm oil for export in the nineteenth century (Le Herissé 1911, p. 83–86). In the Sudan, it may be that taxes in kind were more important than in the forest areas. In the Sokoto Caliphate, it appears that the *zakat* was paid in kind, though the *kharaj* was paid in cowries, and the remittances from the emirates to Sokoto consisted of cowries, slaves, and cloth (Johnston 1967, pp. 172–173, 176); in Bornu, the *sadaga* was paid in grain, but the *binumran* in "money, cloth, garments, cattle and horses" (Brenner 1973, pp. 109–110); while in Masina, it appears that both the *zakat* and the *kharaj* were paid in kind, though the latter was assessed in cowries (Johnson 1976, pp. 486–487).

It thus appears that, although some direct taxes were paid in agricultural produce, a great deal of direct taxation was paid in money or in trade goods. Direct taxation cannot, therefore, be regarded as falling upon agriculture as opposed to trade; direct taxation, as well as indirect taxation, was drawing wealth from the exchange sector of the economy.

CONCLUSIONS

The general conclusion to be drawn from this is that, perhaps to a greater degree than might be evident at first sight (and maybe to a greater degree in the forest than in the savannah), West African rulers were drawing their incomes, directly or indirectly, from trade. They engaged directly in the production of goods for sale (especially slaves). They levied taxes on trading caravans and commercial transactions. And even the direct taxes which they levied were paid in money and trade goods to a greater extent than in agricultural produce. Agricultural produce was essential, to feed the kings and their officials, but most rulers apparently preferred to feed their courts through the labour of slaves on their own farms, and to exact money or goods rather than foodstuffs in tribute from their subjects.

In part, this was probably due to the difficulty (or high cost) of transport, which made it uneconomical to move large quantities of foodstuffs to the ruler's capital. The same problem existed in medieval Europe, where it was solved by moving the king or noble to his tribute: as Bloch observes, the itinerations of the medieval lord were due to the fact that "it was necessary for him to consume the produce on the spot, for to transport it to a common centre would have been both inconvenient and expensive" (Bloch 1962, p. 63). The apparent greater importance of taxes in kind in the Sudan than in the forest, while it may owe something to the influence of Islamic patterns of taxation in the former area, may be accounted for primarily by the availability in the Sudan of the donkey, which reduced the difficulties of transporting foodstuffs in bulk; in the forest, where trypanosomiasis kept out beasts of burden and transport was by human porterage, this was not feasible over large distances. But there was also the consideration that there was little point in accumulating large quantities of basic foodstuffs. Since most families grew their own food, there was only a very limited market for basic foods, so that any foodstuffs accumulated over and above the palace's own consumption needs would be useless. It was better to accumulate money and trade goods, which could be used for prestigious conspicuous consumption, to attract support or buy off opposition, or to exchange against military supplies such as horses and firearms.

The apparent preference to the payment of taxes in money—cowries or gold—is especially interesting. It must be assumed that the spread of the use of cowry shells as money in West Africa depended upon state initiative—this was certainly the case with the introduction of the cowry currency in Bornu in the 1840s (Barth 1965, vol. 2, p. 55). Polanyi (1966, p. 84) has suggested that in Dahomey the use of cowries in local trade was made compulsory, and compulsory monetization of transactions is also reported of the Asante northern market of Salaga (Wilks 1971, p. 132). Why did West African rulers seek to monetize their economies? In part, this may have been a source of direct profit: in Dahomey, it appears that the issue of *strung* cowries was a monopoly of the palace, which received a commission of several cowries on each string (Forbes 1851, vol 2, pp. 183–184; Dalzel 1793, pp. xii, 214–215). However, there may have been something more; cowries have been favored in order to facilitate taxation. Lovejoy has drawn attention to the preference for the payment of taxes in cowries in the Sokoto Caliphate, and has observed that this must have served to force people into the market economy—"a policy remarkably similar to the one which the later colonial régimes pursued in their efforts to see their own currencies adopted" (Lovejoy 1974, p. 581). The parallel is, however, not quite exact. The colonial governments demanded the payment of taxes in money primarily in order to force their subjects into the money economy, to encourage them to grow cash crops or take wage employment in the export sector (Crowder 1968, pp. 186, 206). The African governments, on the other hand, perhaps introduced cowries, and forced their subjects into the market economy, in order to facilitate the collection of taxes in a useful (i.e., exchangeable) form.

It by no means follows from this, of course, that it was altogether impossible to create and finance a state structure in an area without substantial commerce. Nineteenth century Masina seems a clear example of a viable state established in an area with little trade, where revenues therefore had to necessarily be collected primarily in agricultural produce. However, the case of Masina can equally be used to illustrate the importance of trade for state-building. As Johnson observes, the rulers of Masina were fortunate in that the asceticism of their Islamic ideology precluded the need for lavish conspicuous consumption of luxury goods; yet in the end, the overthrow of Masina by al-Hajj ᶜUmar was facilitated by its inability to arm itself with imported European muskets. "For enduring state-formation," Johnson comments, "self-sufficiency is probably not enough" (Johnson 1976, p. 495).

FOOTNOTES

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1. The principal exceptions are the studies of Asante finances by Arhin (1967), and of Masina, by Johnson (1976). For Asante, there is also a great deal of detailed information in Wilks (1975), esp. pp. 431–438. The writer has also attempted an analysis of the revenues of the Yoruba kingdom of Oyo (Law [1977], pp. 228–233).

2. As in Masina (see Johnson [1976], pp. 483–448, 495).

3. For an exploration of the implications of the distribution of horses and firearms for political structures in West Africa, see Law (1976).

4. For the case of the Sokoto Caliphate, see Last (1967) p. 80. For that of Masina, see Johnson (1976) p. 485.

5. But see Hopkins (1973) p. 26, note 5. See also Le Herissé (1911) pp. 83–90 for Dahomey and Fadipe (1970) pp. 219–222 for the Yoruba kingdoms.

6. Hair (1965). Hair gives reasons for believing that small-scale enslavements may be over-represented, as against large-scale slave-raids, in this sample.

7. For the operations of the *batafo*, see esp. Wilks (1975) pp. 686–688.

8. See e.g., Bosman (1705) p. 362 for Whydah; Le Herissé (1911) p. 87 for Dahomey; Fadipe (1970) pp. 219–220 for Yorubaland.

9. See the *Kitab al-Farq* of ᶜUthman, quoted in Hodgkin (1975) p. 251.

10. See e.g., Johnston (1967) p. 172 for the Sokoto Caliphate; Smith (1960) p. 93 for Zaria; Brenner (1973) p. 172 for Bornu; Oloruntimehin (1972) p. 177 for the empire of al-Hajj ᶜUmar.

11. See e.g., Ryder (1969) pp. 206, 273 for Benin; Daaku (1970) p. 27 and (1971), p. 171 for the Akan states; Le Herissé (1911) pp. 89–90 for Dahomey.

12. See Last (1967) p. 106 for the Sokoto Caliphate; Arhin (1967) pp. 283–284 and Wilks (1975) pp. 420, 697–698 for Asante; Le Herissé (1911) pp. 84–85 and Dalzel (1793) p. 175 for Dahomey; and Fadipe (1970) p. 221 for the Yoruba Kingdoms.

13. Smith (1960) p. 93 (Zaria); Brenner (1973) p. 110 (Bornu).

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