



ИЗ ИСТОРИИ АФРИКИ AFRICAN STUDIES

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Research article

The history of the Notion of the State in West Africa: from the destruction of empires to the emergence of the modern state resulting from colonization (the case of the Mali Empire)

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This article aims to address the question of the emergence of empires in West Africa from the ninth century to the present day. The author plans to make an in-depth analysis of the political formation of the different empires which have succeeded each other in this vast West African space which nowadays shelters the current republics of Mali and Mauritania in particular and in general throughout other West African countries (Guinea, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Niger).

The largest and most famous empires that appeared on the territory of what is now Mali is called the Ghana Empire in the 9th century and was succeeded by the Mali or Mandé Empire in the 13th century. The influence of these empires throughout Africa and the rest of the world shows us a particular interest in understanding over time the notion of the State in Africa before the colonization and destruction of the African political system and its replacement by colonial state with the arrival of Europeans.

Today the question of the weakness of the modern or postcolonial state in Africa and Mali poses many questions not only in the concert of nations but also in the academic and university environment.

We will try to demonstrate in this article the link between the break in the evolution of the African state and the imposition of the modern European state through the colonial state which is at the root of the backwardness of African countries in terms political, economic and social compared to the rest of the world.

Keywords: Empire, State, political stability, historical evolution, corruption, European colonization, Postcolonial state, modernization, poverty, West Africa

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Introduction. The question of the African continent in universal history remains scorned compared to other continents in the various research centers and universities around the world. The history of the continent is not studied enough, written and taught not only outside the black continent but also within it. The writing and the written accounts of Africa have long remained unknown or knowingly destroyed and hidden by the European colonizers in order to impose their culture and civilization on the African people in order to better control their mentality and exploit their wealth. Despite the existence of certain African scriptures, especially among the Bamoums in Cameroon, the African tradition is essentially oral and unwritten, unlike the Western tradition, endowed with writing and the written tradition with history.

The absence of writing in many African kingdoms and empires will make Western colonizers and thinkers say that “Africa is an ancient continent”. The desire to deny African culture and civilization in order to promote Western culture that the European settlers will also deny the existence of any civilized political organization in Africa (State).

This is how the study of the notion of the state or its appearance in Africa is still debated today. Yet great empires and kingdoms have radiated the history of the African continent from time immemorial until the beginning of European colonization.

The aim of this research is to shed light on the existence of the state in West Africa long before the emergence of the modern state in Europe. The methodological approach used in this article aims to be historic through the various history and research books by objective historians devoid of any political and racist consideration against the African continent.

The Succession of Different empires in West Africa and actual Republic of Mali. The territory of what is now the Republic of Mali experienced a succession of empires and kingdoms for hundreds of years before the arrival of the first Portuguese explorers in Africa. Among these brilliant empires and kingdoms of West Africa, three stand out more than the others. These are the Ghana Empire, the Mali Empire and the Songhay Empire which we consider necessary to demonstrate in this article. As already explained earlier in the introduction, it is very important to note that state structures shaped the history of West Africa before European penetration. We know that this western part of the continent has seen the flourishing of state structures, empires and kingdoms, city-states and that before “1600, Africa deployed the whole range of formations, from clans to Empires, which involves an incredible amount of political experience” [1. P. 397]. A big difference between the African tradition and the Western tradition is in terms of writing and speaking. One of the major problems for the material justification of the existence and influence of African empires and kingdoms was the absence of writing for several centuries or even millennia. Yet Africa has managed to preserve its history through oral tradition, that is to say the transmission of knowledge and historical accounts by word of mouth from generation to generation.

Few sources relate the founding of states in Africa. The three most important written Arabic sources are those of Ibn Battuta, who traveled to Mali and on the Niger River between February 1352 and December 1353, of Ibn Kaldoun, who wrote a History of the Berbers including notes on Sudan and finally that of Leon the African sent to Sudan around 1517 by the Moroccan princes, who would later write a Description of Africa, a third part of the world [2. P. 51].

Numerous studies have attempted to study the process of the formation of the primitive state [3], namely the transition from an organization based on kinship to a territorialized political organization.

The Empire of Ghana (VIII–XI centuries)

This empire was created by the Soninké (about the 7th century) and at the time of its golden age (9th-11th centuries), it extended from the middle of Senegal to Timbuktu, desert areas inhabited by the Berbers (so the Sahel and part of Nigerien Sudan). The political structure is relatively unknown except that this empire was divided into provinces and kingdoms, themselves subdivided into cantons and villages. The administration of this very large empire is not uniform throughout the territory, probably combining several systems of government: certain kingdoms, such as Diara or Sosso, are vassal kingdoms, ruled by kings who pay tribute and bring a contingent of warriors to the King of Ghana; other kingdoms are ruled by princes of the royal family; provinces are directed by governors, directly attached to the king, whose orders they carry out, raise taxes, ensure pacification and administer justice in his name. Finally, the king's vassals and governors play the role of advisers and ministers to the king, himself assisted by a Prime Minister. The main functions are the administration of the imperial treasury, foreigners, the government of the capital, the palace and the judiciary. The main resources of the empire consist of gold, taxes paid by the subject provinces and kingdoms and taxes collected on trade.

The empire of Ghana occupies a large place in the consciousness of contemporary Africa, as a symbol of the past glories with which we want to reconnect, beyond the humiliations of the colonial era. It was however almost forgotten by the oral tradition, and the historians manage to evoke it only with a lot of pain, because of an extreme shortage of sources [4]. From the middle of the 13th century began a bitter and merciless struggle between the Almoravid bands, who represented Islam and the Sarakollé kings of Ghana who, although having always been hospitable to Muslims, were said to be the champions paganism. In 1054, Aoudaghost, although capital of a Berber kingdom, was attacked, taken and plundered by Abdallah ben Yassine, under the pretext that this city paid tribute to the king of Ghana. Finally, in 1076, the Almoravids seized the old Sudanese city and passed with the sword all the inhabitants who did not want to embrace Islam. Eleven years later, in 1087, shortly after the capture of Seville by Youssof ben Tachfine gave Spain to the Almoravids already masters of Morocco, Aboubekr was killed in the Adrar, during a new revolt of his subjects the most direct, and the

power of his sect and his dynasty, which had just asserted itself in such a striking fashion in the North of Africa and the South of Europe, disappeared from the very country which had constituted its starting point [5].

The Empire of Mali (11th – 13th centuries)

The Mali Empire developed by aggregating several kingdoms, each kingdom bringing together several clans and chiefdoms, by and for the benefit of the Keita clan in glory of its founder Soundjata Keita. The Soundjata empire is a federation of kingdoms and chiefdoms under his authority and the king is assisted by a council, composed of his companions, warlords and chiefs of lineages. Basically, the villages are grouped into cantons and provinces. In the principal cities, Mansa is represented at the same time by a *cadi*, named directly by him and, in the provinces, by a governor, *farin*, surrounded by a court, local replica of that of Mansa. The flour had a military garrison and a council: “its distance from the capital left it free hands in its administration. Its role was to ensure order, to collect the taxes collected on the tradesmen ‘and it’ governed by the intermediary of the chiefs of the various ethnic groups” [6. P. 40].

For the Mandingos, “Soundjata is also the man who established the social fabric of today’s society. The social relations network is portrayed in terms of the common descendants of Soundjata or one of its generals [...]. Thus, the influence of Soundjata is perceived as having an impact on life today” [7. P. 32–33]. During the reign of Soundjata, Mali benefited from a certain stability and an abundance of food and the apogee of the empire seems to be located at the beginning of the XIVth century under the reign of Mansa Moussa (1312–1337), whose prestige was reported by Ibn Kaldun. From the 15th century, the weakening of the empire enabled some provinces to regain autonomy, such as, for example, the Tuareg who created a Sultanate in Air in the 15th century. However, it is difficult to know its exact limits or how it is organized: we know that the Mandé “extended over a large part of Gambia, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Mali and Guinea” [8. P. 11] and the heart of this empire was to be located between the rivers Niger and Senegal. The decline of the Empire is dated between the 15th and 16th centuries; the provinces emancipate themselves one by one and kingdoms of modest size emerge. Succession disputes, internal strife and mismanagement have weakened the central authority, leaving more freedom to the vassal countries, which have gradually freed themselves from central power and have ended up constituting independent kingdoms. We can take the example of Gao, who will form an independent kingdom at the end of the 14th century and become the third Sudanese empire.

The Songhay Empire (15th and 16th centuries)

Under the Mali Empire, only part of Songhay was free, the rest was dominated, notably the capital Gao. This vassalization is however only provisional, since during the second half of the 15th century, the Songhay begins

to spread and it “was the role of Sonni Ali (1464–1492) who knew, of a small kingdom centered around Koukia, to make an empire which was to have, under his successors, the extent of that of Charlemagne. It is the largest known to medieval tropical Africa” [9. P. 197]. The decline of the Mali Empire led to the rise of the Songhay Empire.

The Songhay empire, under the domination of Sonni Ali Ber (1464-1492) 27 founder of the empire, unifies most of western Sudan around the city of Gao and in the Niger valley against the empire of Mali , the Mossi and the Tuareg. The Songhay have established a centralized, structured state, supported by permanent means. The government of the empire is divided between the central government and the government of the provinces. On the one hand are the conquered territories, directly administered by the Askia and ruled by governors, personal representatives of the emperor; on the other, the defeated countries, vassals or tributaries, ruled by traditional chiefs recognized by the Askia, governed by their local law. The Songhay empire thus established both direct and indirect domination over its territories. At the level of the central government, Gao has been the capital of the empire since the 12th century when the emperor was surrounded by a large court – ministers, advisers and agents – exercising political functions through the restricted imperial council, the Sunna. This council is associated with the general direction of the affairs, it is chaired by Askia and includes all the high dignitaries of the empire. The members of this council invest in the Askia, but they are in turn subordinated to it by oath.

The imperial domain consists of conquered territories, hierarchical according to their economic and military importance and administered by governors directly dependent on the Askia since appointed and dismissable by him, who have retained the title of farin or faama, inherited from the Mandingo Empire. The powers of these governors are the same as those of the emperor, with the exception of the courts, the exercise of which is delegated to the cadis. In addition to these provinces, there are large cities like Djenné and Tombouctou, ruled by chiefs appointed by Askia. The second category, the defeated countries, is made up of territories federated with the empire but preserving a certain autonomy like, for example, the Hausa city-states, the Berber confederations and Macina. Each sovereign keeps control of his territory, but he is subject to and recognized by Askia, providing tribute and warriors.

The territorial structure of these empires, even unified, remains deeply segmented, the state is reduced to a small region. The process of breaking down these empires has been the same, namely a gradual shrinking in their region of origin. The vassalized states regain their independence, some even managing to expand (which was notably the case of the kingdom of Gao after the decline of the Mali empire). Subsequently, other kingdoms emerge even if none of them will regain the greatness of these Sudanese empires.

The Moroccan conquest in 1591 marks the end of the great empires of western Sudan and the fall of the Songhay empire inaugurates a period of political crises, decomposition and crumbling: the empires give way to a multitude of

political entities, kingdoms, relatively weak and rival chiefdoms, which succeed one another until the colonial conquest.

Conclusion. The study of the Sudanese empires makes it possible to highlight a certain degree of institutionalization of power, a dissociation of political roles consecrating a dynamic of empowerment of the political sphere vis-à-vis the social sphere. These empires are based on relatively strong administrative and military apparatuses, constituting true politico-bureaucratic elites. This period, which extends from the 13th to the 18th centuries, is a phase of state structuring, with diverse political experiences. Their vulnerability is partly due to their vastness and crises are most often due to the phases of devolution of power. This traditional state is distinguished from the modern state since the preexisting political units are never melted.

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Научная статья

История понятия государства в Западной Африке: от разрушения империй до появления современного государства в результате колонизации (на примере империи Мали)

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Автор статьи ставит перед собой задачу проанализировать вопрос о возникновении империй в Западной Африке с девятого века до наших дней. Самая большая и самая известная империя, появившаяся на территории современного государства Мали, в IX веке называлась Империей Ганы, а в XIII веке на смену ей пришла Империя Мали или Манде. Влияние этих империй в Африке позволяет прийти к пониманию понятия

государства в Африке до колонизации и разрушения политической системы Африки и ее замены колониальным государством с приходом европейцев.

В этой статье мы попытаемся продемонстрировать связь между разрывом в развитии африканского государства и навязыванием современного европейского государства через колониальное государство, которое лежит в основе отсталости африканских стран с точки зрения политической, экономической и социальной по сравнению с остальным миром.

Ключевые слова: империя, государство, политическая стабильность, историческая эволюция, коррупция, европейская колонизация, постколониальное государство, модернизация, бедность, Западная Африка

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