

The Hausa City-States from 1450 to 1804¹

ROBERT GRIFFETH

(RESPONDENTS: PAUL SINCLAIR & ANTHONY KIRK-GREENE)

The Hausa of modern northern Nigeria and southern Niger constitute one of Black Africa's largest populations. They share a very old common historical tradition, and they speak and write in a language which has spread widely across West Africa's vast grasslands as a result of the vigorous commercial enterprise of their long-distance traders. They are also among the most fully Islamized of sub-Saharan Africa's peoples, although the vitality of pre-Muslim Hausa customs and beliefs remains strong in their culture down to the present day. But of all the features of Hausa civilization that have come to symbolize their distinctive way of life, those associated with the great walled cities of Hausaland's core territories are central.

For nearly three hundred and fifty years (ca. 1450-1804) Kano and Katsina, Daura, Gobir, and Zazzau (Zaria) as well as many similar, if smaller, expressions of the urban phenomenon flourished as sovereign city-states within the general milieu of an evolving common Hausa culture. As in the cases of city-states in antiquity and Western Europe's late medieval and early modern experience, the Hausa urban polities were almost continuously challenged and disturbed by powerful imperial neighbors; they also spent a great deal of their energies in competing and warring with each other. At the same time, each possessed that essential special feature of all city-states: those who constituted the local community—rulers, citizens, and subjects—regarded themselves as sovereign, as belonging wholly to a place and a defined social unity which commanded their highest allegiance. While recognizing and affirming the cultural ties which knit them to all other Hausa, they nonetheless prized most their independence and often struggled mightily to insure that it remained unfettered by encroachments from foreign kingdoms and neighboring Hausa alike. The walled cities were thus more than symbols of independence and places of refuge in stressful times: the walls enclosed that space, that almost sacred terrain, within which each member of the community

could affirm and secure his or her status in the best of times as well as the worst. A Hausa expression of one's ultimate loyalties and pride of identity is summed up in the proverbial statement, "He who has not seen Kano has not seen the world."

The origins and early development of Hausa city-state civilization are both ancient and poorly known.² The first adequately documented instances of city-states *in situ* appear only near the end of the first millennium A.D. While both physical evidence and oral tradition speak of cities and their rulers as early as the eleventh century, the fully developed Hausa city-state civilization is known in fair detail only from the mid-fifteenth century. By that time the written accounts begin to reflect the strongly Islamic features which have come to characterize certain key groups of the population. The internal vigor of the strongest states, coupled with the declining powers of their formerly potent Songhay (western) and Bornuese (eastern) imperial neighbors, caused the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to be a period when the Hausa city-states reached their full flowering as sovereign entities. Local production and foreign commerce both grew dramatically. Great market centers flourished and expanded, particularly at Kano. Hausa merchants penetrated new commercial zones far to the west and south. The socio-economic structures within individual states grew increasingly complex and specialized. And all exhibited greater signs of Islamic influence in the patterns of intellectual and cultural life as well as in government.

This great age of city-state dominance ended abruptly during the years 1804-12 when the Fulani, a distinguishably foreign people who had entered Hausaland from the far West African grasslands as cattle herdsman over the previous four to six centuries, organized and successfully carried out a revolution based on Islamic reformism (*jihad*) that finally and definitively swept away the cherished local sovereignty of the most important Hausa states. In their

place the new Fulani rulers established a Muslim imperial government, the Caliphate.³ The city-states became provincial capitals (emirates) owing allegiance and paying regular taxes to the Caliph, who ruled from the new imperial city of Sokoto. This Hausa-Fulani empire, as it came to be called, pursued a campaign of imperial expansion that extended far beyond the frontiers of traditional Hausaland. It became, in fact, one of the largest and most powerful states of nineteenth century Africa. When it, too, fell victim to foreign rule under British and French conquerors in the early years of the twentieth century, the result was not a restoration of quasi sovereignty to the old Hausa city-states. The British, in particular, ruled their new Nigerian colony (to which Hausaland was amalgamated as a major region) by maintaining and attempting to modernize the Fulani-created administrative apparatus. One consequence was an even greater diminution of local city-state autonomy than had occurred during the pre-colonial era. This expanded and colonially shored-up Hausa-Fulani Caliphate and emirate system of government was itself badly shattered in January 1966 when the last ruler, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Premier of the Northern Region, was assassinated in the course of the first Nigerian *coup d'état*.

Most standard accounts of Hausa history have paid scant attention to the pre-1804 city-state period. Those three and one half centuries extending from the successful introduction of Muslim influence to Hausaland up to the Fulani *jihād* are usually depicted as an era of unrelieved internal competition and warfare during which time the Hausa states more often than not suffered from the depredations and tribute exactions of powerful neighbors. Historical interest has also focused on the theme of West African Islamic development in which the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are regarded as a time of Hausa religious and cultural regression from what were the sound Islamic beginnings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁴ From this perspective the city-state period is merely a long, painful time of transition when the potentially civilizing forces of Islam are kept in check by endemic political disorder and the resurgence of local, pagan traditions: "good" Muslims were forced to bide their time, mute their discontents, and await the chance to put things to right, which they did finally when the Fulani reformers coalesced into a potent new revolutionary party.

As in many other instances, this view of Hausa history demonstrates once again the high order of preference shown by historians for the study of powerful

centralized states and empires with emphasis placed upon the spread of "universal civilizations" such as Islam. The achievements, and setbacks, of societies which exist on smaller political scales and which assert local, "particularistic" cultural traditions command a lesser share of attention and interest. This essay will attempt to shift that unequal balance of attention and interest by treating the relatively long age of developed Hausa city-state culture as a notable achievement worthy of study in its own right.

Geographical Setting and Hausa Pre-State Developments

Hausaland proper, that core area within which Hausa speech, society, and culture leading to the establishment of those urban concentrations known as *birni* (pl. *birane*), gradually developed in the well-watered grassland zone of modern northwestern Nigeria and southern Niger. This zone, bordered by the Sahara on the north, is part of a vast territory called by Arab geographers the *bilad al-Sudan*, "Land of the Blacks," and spans the continent in the vicinity of ten to fifteen degrees north latitude from Ethiopia to Senegal. Except for the northernmost limits of the Sahel (the last latitudinal zone in which farming is possible before entering the desert itself) no pronounced geographical features separate Hausaland from similar grasslands that encircle its eastern, western, and southern flanks. Stream and river courses maintaining annual flows intersect it; and generally speaking, the whole of the region is capable of supporting settled farming communities. This ecological condition has existed throughout historical times and is certainly the basis upon which cereal agriculture (millet and sorghum predominate as staple food crops), cotton and indigo cultivation, and animal domestication spread. The first Hausa settlements were in all likelihood small family-managed farms which grew over time into more densely populated villages (*garuruwa*, sing. *gari*) of extended kin. Some few of the *garuruwa* subsequently enlarged their territories while preserving at their centers the nuclei of the first *birni*.

Scholarly controversy has enveloped the discussion of Hausa *birane* origins. The most popular view until quite recently was based largely upon the preserved Hausa written accounts and scraps of information taken from the reports of medieval travelers. This view asserted that the Hausa oral accounts were formally written down by literate Muslims some two hundred or so years ago and that they embodied an

amorphous legendary tale of a founding ancestor, Abayajidda, a foreigner from the central Arab lands of the Near East, which reflected a Muslim bias that vastly postdated the actual establishment of Hausa culture. In order to grapple with this complicating element, some scholars have chosen to strip the accounts of what they regarded as merely legendary (that is, the stipulated facts contained in the written accounts) while at the same time proceeding to argue that Hausa culture of the present day is very old—some would assert two to three millennia. Archaeological evidence is almost wholly lacking to support this argument, but speculations based upon the comparative study of the languages spoken in the Central Sudan are made to give secondary support to the concept of an ancient Hausa culture that evolved over many hundreds of years prior to the present millennium. To the extent that foreign influence was thought to have played a significant role in this basically indigenous development, it was seen to have come from the north, the Saharan lands of the Tuareg nomadic peoples.

This general view has been termed by Professor J. E. G. Sutton, in a recent reconceptualization of the whole problem, as the “orthodox” view of Hausa beginnings.⁵ Sutton, who feels that the written record must be taken far more seriously as an historically accurate description of “true” Hausa origins, argues that the record itself in combination with a more precise understanding of linguistic evidence reveals “the clear message...that Hausa expanded from east to west across the savanna belt of Northern Nigeria. And the relative homogeneity of the language and culture within this vast zone indicated that the spread is quite recent (within the present millennium, say).” Further, Sutton argues that while the written sources are clearly idealized, they do represent real historical developments that “enshrine the vague memory of how Hausaland and ‘Hausaness’ began from a series of small centers and hill-bases on its eastern side” which subsequently were extended to the western Hausa areas of Zamfara and Gobir by the seventeenth century.⁶

Sutton’s reformulation of the question is very convincing. It identifies Hausa language directly with its closest set of neighbors, the tongues spoken by the Teda-Daza peoples of the Lake Chad region. It conforms the direction of movement of peoples in this whole region—basically an east to west migration—to the evidence presented in the oral and written accounts. And, Sutton’s postulation of a more recent date (during the present millennium) for the emergence of a homogeneous Hausa culture, including the

foundation of the nuclear Hausa states, also accords well with both the traditions and the Muslim elements contained within them. Using Sutton’s guidelines, we shall now turn to the Hausa oral and written accounts themselves in order to chart Hausa city-state beginnings.

Foundations of the First City-States

In the “Legend of the Queen of Daura and Abayajidda” the Hausa possess one of Africa’s most elaborately developed epic tales of origin. The story seeks to explain the circumstances surrounding the founding kingly lineages in each of the original seven *birane* and the relation of these states to nearby neighbors. It places heavy emphasis on the unity of Hausa culture despite the obvious disunity of the city-states in the political sphere. The tale also reflects many elements of formal Islamic story-telling, the main purpose of which is to link the distinctly non-Arab Hausa to the old centers of the Daura Legend, each differing from the others in important matters of detail and chronology; but all versions preserve the key features mentioned here.⁷

Abayajidda (or as he is known in the commonest of the versions, Abuyazidu) was a son of Abdulahi, king of Baghdad. He quarreled with his father, left Baghdad with a large company of followers, journeyed west, and finally arrived in the Bornu kingdom (located on the western edge of Lake Chad), Hausaland’s strongest and nearest imperial neighbor. The Bornu *Mai* (ruler) saw that his visitor was very strong and commanded a great following of armed horsemen. He thereupon arranged for the marriage of his daughter, the Princess Magira, to Abayajidda. Subsequently, the *Mai* asked Abayajidda for the loan of his horsemen in order to conduct a campaign against Bornu’s foes. In exchange for this the *Mai* promised that upon his return from battle he would install his son-in-law’s lieutenants as princes in the country. This promise proved to be a skillful deceit as the *Mai* intended to use his newly enlarged army to attack and kill the newcomers. Warned of this treachery by his wife, Abayajidda and Magira fled to the west, soon arriving in the first of the Hausa territories, Daura, at the site of Birni Gabas ta Buram. There he left his Bornuese wife and journeyed on farther with one of his concubines to Birnin Daura.

Upon his arrival he was extended hospitality by an old woman named Waira. He asked her for water and received the reply that water was available only on Fridays as there was a great and menacing snake who

dwelt in the well and prevented people from drawing water on all the other days of the week. So Abayajidda took a bucket and went to the well to see for himself. When he let the bucket down, the snake appeared; but Abayajidda drew his knife and cut off the snake's head. The following morning, which was Friday, the townspeople came to the well and saw the body of the slain snake. The Queen of Daura, who was summoned, asked her people who had killed the snake. Many lied and claimed credit for the act. She then asked for the snake's head, and none who had spoken could produce it. Waira then spoke and said that her visitor, a man who arrived the night before on an animal "which was like a horse and yet was not a horse" had gone to the well for water. She reasoned that it may have been this visitor who slew the snake. Abayajidda, when summoned, produced the snake's severed head.

Then the Queen said that she had promised half her kingdom to any who could rid her domain of the snake's menacing presence; but Abayajidda asked instead that she marry him. And so he remained with the Queen of Daura as her husband along with the concubine who had accompanied him. Thereafter he was called by the name Makassarkin (snake-killer) and it was to him that the people were asked to bear their news. The concubine bore a son who was called Mukarbigari. Then the Queen of Daura bore a son whose name was Bawogari. Upon his father's death, Bawo became the ruler (*sarki*, pl. *sarakuna*) in his father's place.

Bawo in his turn had six sons. These were Gazauro who succeeded to the Daura kingship and Bagauda who founded Kano State; Gunguma who became king of Zazzau (Zaria) and Duma, king of Gobir; Kumayau established his rule over Katsina and Zamna Kogi over Rano. These six were all descended from three of Bawo's wives, each pair from a common mother. Together with a son of Abayajidda's Bornuese wife, Magira, who had remained at Gabas ta Buram (Biram), these offspring of a common grandfather are regarded by the Hausa as the founding ancestors of the Hausa Bakwai, or the "true and legitimate Hausa Seven." A parallel line of descendants from Abayajidda and his concubine through her son, Mukarbigari, went on to found seven other states, the "bastard or illegitimate Seven," termed the Banza Bakwai. These latter include most of the kingdoms which flank Hausaland to the south and west and are usually identified as Zamfara, Kebbi, Nupe, Gwari, Yauri, Yoruba, and Kwararafa. References to them appear constantly in the Hausa traditions and written

records, with principal emphasis placed on their inferior status within the immediate Hausa cultural world.

Two of the Hausa city-states, Kano and Zaria, developed especially rich local traditions which cast considerable light on critical features of city-state growth. Kano, though frequently locked in fierce competitive struggle with Katsina, appears to have been the first state to have created an effective army used to enlarge and consolidate the territory under its control. By the seventeenth century, Kano had also become the major international market center of Hausaland (a position which on earlier occasions was held by Katsina), the main terminus for the trans-Saharan trade routes coming down from North Africa. And, finally, Kano also developed as the most important center of Muslim culture in Hausaland. Not only had its rulers and noble classes converted, but Kano also had a large population of foreign Muslims, among whom the Wangara (Mande-speaking merchant groups from the Western Grasslands region of the middle and upper Niger river) are credited with first introducing the civilization of the Prophet to Hausaland.

Zaria, the most southerly of the Hausa Seven, records in its traditions two matters of great interest in the process of city-state growth. First, its deep association with the tradition of wall-building under its great sixteenth century monarch, Queen Amina, who is credited with introducing techniques of construction widely imitated throughout the region. Second, the practice of slave trading, as its position closest to the non-Hausa stateless peoples ideally located it for that purpose.

Of the remaining traditional Hausa Bakwai, Katsina – Kano's principal competitor – most clearly developed into the strongest state in the early part of the period. Rano remained a small state, virtually disappearing from the record by the seventeenth century. Daura and Biram, the original *birane* of tradition, were continuously subjected to the influence of the Bornu empire and did not become in either scale or political and economic importance the equal of Kano, Katsina, and Zaria. Gobir, the seventh of the leading states, has a history that sets it apart from the other six. As the most northerly of the Hausa core states, its development is inextricably intertwined with the affairs of the desert nomads of Aïr. In a sense, Gobir was the gateway kingdom through which merchants plying the desert trade had to pass before entering the densely settled Hausa core. By the same token, it had also to serve as the first line of defense for all the rest from the possible depredations of the nomadic

grated into this vast, Muslim-dominated international trading network, it was as a receiver of goods that had first passed through the Malian and Bornuese imperial market centers or as a supplier of locally manufactured articles, particularly indigo dyed cotton cloth. In the fifteenth century both Katsina and Kano were beginning to attract an increasing volume of the trans-Saharan trade, a development which was in later centuries to make these cities commercially dominant throughout the Sudan.

Before that happened, however, Hausaland was to experience in a much more direct way the influence of reborn imperial power. The Songhay empire, successor to Old Mali, appeared on the scene in the middle of the fifteenth century and, from its imperial cities of Gao and Timbuktu, rather regularly entered into the affairs of the Hausa, breaking down the long period of relative isolation. Similarly, from the east, Bornu developed a much greater capacity to intervene in Hausaland and often did so by demanding tribute from the Hausa kings. But by this time the core *birane* had evolved into a fairly strong set of city-states, each protected from all but the most serious armed invasions by its ring of defensive walls. Despite foreign meddling, the city-state structures remained intact as autonomous political entities, so that by the end of the sixteenth century, when Songhay power was crushed by the invading forces of a Moroccan army and Bornu became much troubled by both internal difficulties and external threats, the Hausa states were freed to enter upon their great age of independent development.

A second factor which helped to foster a city-state rather than a highly centralized pattern of political organization in pre-fifteenth century Hausaland may be linked to the area's rich agricultural potential. As was the case in nearly all West Africa's grassland farming populations, the oldest Hausa chiefly offices were identified with the control and use of land by small nuclear units that were knit together by the ties of kinship. Chiefs were either heads (*gidaje*) of patrilineal family groups occupying a common territory or were religious officials charged with performing the cycle of ritual observances regarded as necessary to insure the success of the agricultural enterprise. These latter chiefs were called *sarkin noma*, kings of farming. When more extensive powers became attached to certain chiefs or when others were appointed or elected to perform specialized duties and functions (such as leaders of the hunt, war leaders, and so forth) kinship terminology was frequently retained. This close interconnection between kin-based social organization,

control and use of arable land, and the exercise of ritual functions was the invariable base upon which more elaborate forms of political office grew. As some of the original farming hamlets became the nuclei of the *birni*, each consisting of many different kinship units as well as immigrant settler groups, the old patterns still remained to command the loyalties and to focus the cultural outlook of the ruling groups. This great resilience of traditional Hausa culture subsequently proved capable of confronting, domesticating, and assimilating even so alien a cultural force as Islam when it first appeared in fourteenth century Hausaland.

While the relative isolation of early Hausaland from the main centers of imperial power and international commerce may help to explain why the small farming communities were able to evolve a common, if decentralized, pattern of agriculturally based culture, a third major factor must be identified as the main impetus that led to city-state development. That factor is, in the broadest sense, a sustained growth of Hausa productivity both in agriculture and craft industries. As indicated earlier, Hausaland is located in an exceptionally fertile region of West African grasslands; but it is not the only such area. The characteristic modes of local subsistence production and the types of social organization which they evoked show considerable uniformity throughout the *bilad al-Sudan* from Lake Chad to the Senegal. But only in Hausaland does a true city-state pattern emerge early and endure late. All available evidence seems to point to a genuine growth of the economy based upon greater efficiency in the traditional modes of production; the larger economic surplus which resulted enabled specialized classes of artisans (weavers, dyers, metalsmiths, leather-workers) to devote their time exclusively to craft production, a mode which often flourishes best in an urban setting. The growth of urban concentrations, the core *birane*, in turn attracted large numbers of immigrants who swelled the ranks of city-dwellers living under the political control of the traditional Hausa *sarakuna* and their officials. Note, however, that none of the *birane* originated as market centers servicing the international trade. That pattern typified the imperial states whose emperors drew their wealth from taxes levied upon the trade. The reverse development occurred in Hausaland, where first the individual states grew large and then attracted the attention of the international merchant community, and finally surpassed the old imperial market cities as the main destinations of the trans-Saharan and internal West African traders alike.

It is interesting to note that this gradual shift took place roughly contemporaneously with the rise of North European dominance over the world's maritime commerce, although the two developments are not connected.

Historians frequently find it necessary, or convenient, to explain any major historical phenomenon by reference to at least three factors, as has been done here to account for the appearance of the Hausa city-states. In the eyes of the Hausawa, on the other hand, the story is recounted rather differently. At the conclusion of the lengthy, imprecisely documented formative period to which their "Legend of Daura and Abayajidda" refers, each Hausa comes to regard his or her identity as the consequence of belonging to a very specific place and a well-defined social entity: to the *birni*, whose walls enclose the sacred original center as well as provide protection in troubled times; to the rulers whose positions and status are legitimized by the places they occupy in an elaborately hierarchical social structure derived from ancestral kin-relatedness; to a style of life covering everything that possesses deep local roots from work to worship. In a word, sovereignty comes to describe for each Hausa that most cherished of all values: the sense of belonging to a finite place with known boundaries, to a community of persons – both citizen and subject – beyond which no higher authority is recognized. At this point historical tradition is not the common story of all Hausa. History becomes the individual histories of the Hausa *Bakwai*, the original Seven, and of the lesser states. The most recoverable of the early histories begins with fifteenth century Kano, which also supplies the bulk of the evidence for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁸ Even so, the main distinguishing characteristics of all Hausa city-states, large and small, reveal common elements sufficient to make reasonable a collective description of them.

This collective description will be treated under four broad categories: physical appearance and territorial configuration; social and economic organization; political structure and office-holding; and, cultural institutions, with particular reference to the role of Islam.

Physical Appearance and Territorial Configuration

A Hausa city-state comprised the whole of that territory within which the inhabitants recognized the sovereign power exercised by the ruler who resided at its capital. While the range in size varied from as much

as 10 to 13,000 square miles for large states such as Kano and Zaria, many of the smaller states could claim no more than a few hundred square miles. The largest part of the population within each lived in hamlets and small towns, close to its agricultural domains. But each citizen's eyes were turned by loyalty and the formal links maintained by the ruler's officials to the seat of power, the capital city.

The capital *birni*, its massive earthwork walls often encircling a number of square miles, contained the ruler's residence and the walled compound (*gida*) of each senior official; the main market; workshop areas where the artisans and craftsmen plied their specialized trades; residential quarters and compounds of the Hausawa citizenry; wards occupied by resident foreigner groups; and substantial open space. Much of the open space was under cultivation. Protected fields and gardens supplied food for the city-dwellers on those many occasions when the *birni* was under attack and siege. Carefully maintained water wells were strategically located throughout the various quarters; and the garden plots and fields were planted adjacent to marshy ponds and drainage sumps.

Systematic archaeological survey work has yet to be undertaken on the Hausa *birane*. Consequently, the various stages of growth that they experienced are known mainly through traditional attributions to the reigns during which one or another prominent feature of wall and building construction occurred. However, two clues are provided from careful examination of their sites. First, the main core *birane* are located near abundant and easily workable sources of iron-stone, thus providing an essential natural resource for one of the main craft industries. In the case of Kano, the iron-stone is found in hills that subsequently were enclosed by the girdling walls. Second, particularly fertile garden soils with access to perpetual water supplies are invariably present. Oral tradition adds a further dimension to these two features by stressing that original townsites were found in the vicinity of the great *iskoki* (traditional Hausa nature spirits which are still the object of worship by non-Muslim Hausa).⁹

The walls reflect the beginnings of the city-state system since they were clearly designed as defensive fortifications. The *Kano Chronicle* states the time in which this tradition was begun as the eleventh century when Gijimasu, the third *Sarkin* of Kano, assembled the people to begin construction of the walls. They were completed by his son, the fifth *Sarki*, Tsariki, and were entered through eight different gates. Later North African visitors such as Leo Africanus, in the early sixteenth century, remarked on the great scale

achieved by subsequent additions to the Kano walls. By the early nineteenth century, when the English explorer Major Dixon Denham came to Kano for a prolonged stay, we discover that Kano's walls have reached a length of nearly fifteen miles in an irregular oval shape and contain fifteen entry gates.¹⁰ They had been built up to heights of over thirty feet with dry ditches dug on both the inner and outer perimeters at the base. The gates were constructed of heavy wood covered with sheet iron and were large enough in height and width to permit horse-mounted soldiers to pass through easily. Guard houses flanked each gate, and observation posts and low towers were situated at intervals along the wall.

Tradition also records that a great period of wall-building all over Hausaland occurred during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, inspired largely by the female ruler of Zaria, Queen Amina.

Aside from market areas and mosque sites, most structures within the city walls conformed to a single pattern that was most elaborate in the cases of the ruler's palace and the residences of high court officials and wealthy merchants, and was repeated in a less grandiose fashion for the dwellings of the lesser citizenry and resident foreigner groups. The basic unit of this pattern was the mud-walled compound (*gida*) whose internal spatial arrangements mirrored Hausa social structure. The pattern applied equally to the smaller towns and farming hamlets of the city-state's rural countryside, except that these would not always have the encircling defensive walls around the whole.

Each *gida* was entered through a forecourt, the openings to which were off-set so as to conceal the main interior from passersby on the street. Flanking the entryway were areas where unmarried sons had their huts. In the same forecourt area the slave quarters were adjacent to the place where horses and donkeys were tethered. To penetrate the large inner court one continued through a partitioned access hut, its openings also off-set to further obstruct the view from either the street or the forecourt. At the center of the inner court, the compound head (*maigida*) had his dwelling surrounded by the huts, cooking areas, and granaries of his wives. In spaces radiating out from the *maigida's* hut the other male heads of families residing in the compound had their living quarters, similarly encircled by the huts of their wives. Common bathing and latrine areas were located at the rear of the inner court, screened off by mat walls and partitions. In the case of a particularly prosperous *gida*, a well might also be maintained within the walls.

The *gida's* labyrinthine entry pattern reinforced the Hausa social practice of *kulle* (wife-seclusion), while the flanking arrangement of the interior court huts reflected the hierarchical organization of the various polygamous family groups, single adults, and slaves who together made up the residential unit. The entryway space (*zaure*) served the additional crucial function of providing a gathering place for males. Here male neighbors greeted each other and socialized; during the dry season men also plied their craft activities, particularly weaving, in the *zaure*. Rich merchants or important administrative officials might have a separate audience room that was more private than the *zaure*, and was located closer to, or within, the inner courtyard; but, for most of the citizenry, the compound's entry-space held the most important Hausa social activities: men's talk and men's work. Should a compound contain but one outside opening, it was regarded as housing a single social unit under the control of the senior male, regardless of how many actual domestic groups lived within. Were a second or more doorways cut through the walls, these would be reckoned as constituting evidence of additional social units for purposes of census, taxation, and the like.

Three other types of structure – or defined space – complete the physical layout of the large *birni* and smaller towns alike. The first of these is the market which, in the capitals, was a very large, centrally located place that might include sheltered stalls under mat roofing, permanent mud-brick buildings, and large open – but carefully staked out – spaces assigned to purveyors of goods who attended the market daily. The second characteristic structure was the mosque. Each quarter of the main cities would surely have its mosque, often more than one. In many instances the mosque would consist of little more than an arrangement of stones laid out on the ground with its eastern alignment containing a niche indicating the appropriate orientation toward Mecca for the recitation of daily prayers. In other cases the mosque would be more elaborate, sometimes an enclosed area with muezzin's tower for calling the faithful to prayer. Such mosques might possess areas shaded by trees or mats where the *mallam* (Islamic religious teacher) held classes for young boys and serious older students. Although the evidence is not wholly clear, it would appear that the construction of grand central mosques (such as had taken place in the imperial states of Mali and Songhay in their cities of Timbuktu and Jenne) did not occur until the nineteenth century under the Fulani rulers. The clear assumption is that during the city-state period the ruler's palace and the

central market served as more significant physical landmarks than did the mosques, even in the largest cities. The third characteristic of the *birni* consisted of specialized wards or quarters. Some of these were places devoted to particular crafts, such as the indigo dyeing pit areas or the forge and smithy works of the metalsmiths. Others were special villages for the blind or lepers. Strangers' quarters, as for instance dwellings occupied by long-distance foreign traders who swelled the cities' populations to nearly twice their resident size during certain months of the year, were a bit different from the *gida* pattern of the Hausawa.

These characteristic features of the great *birni* were, ideally, repeated in the provincial towns, the *gari*. On more modest scales the *gari*, too, was encircled by earthwork defensive walls. Each had its market of either the periodic (meeting on regular cycles of every fourth, fifth, or seventh day) or daily type. Mosques with their resident *mallamai* and members of the main craft guilds would be found there, too. But standing at the center of the *gari*'s area would be the *gida* of the governor or provincial administrator of the district. This official's role would be to oversee (to rule) the ward heads of the *gari* and to command, protect, and tax the farming hamlets where the overwhelming majority of the population resided. The village and town areas were clearly defined territories, each possessing its known share of the city-state's rural domains. So clear was the pattern that the Fulani rulers of the nineteenth century were able to allocate the *gari* as "fiefs" to the aristocrats who came to rule Hausaland after the *jihād*. The British, in their turn, formalized the *gari* as the smallest units of local administration and simply assimilated this traditional form of territorial organization into their structure of colonial overrule.

The principal variation from this pattern of territorial organization that linked the humblest farmer to the king concerned the uncultivated wastelands and fields that were regularly allowed to lie fallow. While these lands unquestionably belonged to the city-state, they served as pasturage for the cattle-keeping Fulani. Very often the farmers encouraged the pasturing of cattle on fallow fields and exchanged surplus grain with the herdsmen in return for milk, meat, and the recognized benefits of soil revitalization through animal manuring. Whereas town-dwelling Fulani were assimilated into the structure of government and controlled under Hausa *sarki* in the same fashion as any other foreigner group, the pastoral Fulani (*Fulanin bororoje*) continued to live among the farmers while obeying the dictates of their nomadic leaders. They

remained little influenced by Hausa social, political, and cultural (e.g., Islamic) institutions so long as the focus remained the economic symbiosis described here. Eventually, of course, the pagan pastoral Fulani joined with their Muslim, town-dwelling brethren (the *Fulanin gida*) in the jihadic revolution that swept the Hausa *sarakuna* from power.

In summary, nothing about Hausaland's physical location nor its socio-economic development up through the city-state period appears to distinguish it sharply from other West African grassland societies. Adjoining territories in the Chadic east and Niger west were similarly fertile and open. The peoples of both areas practiced an agriculture and developed craft industries comparable in character to those of the Hausa. Herdsmen, more often than not pastoral Fulani, practiced a system of economic exchange with the farmers based upon occupational specialization and this pattern extended right across the *bilad al-Sudan* from Senegal to Chad. Even at the level of territorial organization and systems of local government, considerable similarities can be found to have existed between the Hausa and, for example, peoples such as the Malinke of the Upper Niger valleys. But of all these regions, only Hausaland evolved and nurtured the city-state society to a high level, whereas its neighbors early found themselves subjects of imperial overlords.

In an effort to understand why this development occurred, let us now turn to a brief consideration of the second general descriptive feature of Hausaland in the city-state era – its social and economic organization.

Hausa Society and Economy

All Hausa city-states were plural societies.¹¹ The Hausawa, or free citizenry, formed the largest segment of the population in the city and countryside alike. But in each state – with important internal variations – non-Hausa were both directly incorporated within, or were formally attached to, the rigorously hierarchical Hausa social structure. Ethnicity, defined in this context as full membership in a Hausa patrilineal descent group, represented only one – if usually the most important – ingredient that conferred social status and rights upon both citizens and subjects of the ruler's domain.

Two major groups of non-Hausa were accorded exceptional status. The Fulani pastoralists, whose mode of life required their regular movement over wide areas both within and between states, had to be governed by rules different from those that regulated

the affairs of the settled rural and urban populations. The other group consisted of both long-distance traders and Muslim clerics who were foreigners by origin but who came to reside more or less permanently in individual states. Individuals who belonged to either of these prestigious communities were frequently allowed to organize and administer their own internal affairs under the general supervision of the *sarki's* officials. Nearly all other persons of foreign origin were absorbed within the basic Hausa social structure as slaves or in other categories of rank and class (e.g. occupational castes and guilds, such as ironworkers) that fell distinctly short of "free" status.

The Hausa ideal of what should constitute a well-regulated social order was based on the primacy of kinship. The humblest farmer (*talaka*) was linked to the noble classes and his ruler by bonds of shared blood. Males who could lay claim to lineage membership in this fashion (women were regarded as legal minors) constituted the bulk of the free citizen population. However, the socially pluralistic reality which everywhere existed – a reality that militated against strict application of the ethnically defined kinship principle – meant that large numbers of socially useful, occupationally specialized persons of non-Hausa origin had somehow to be grafted upon the kinship structure, especially where their roles in the economic and cultural life of the state were crucial to its success as an enterprise. In some instances this was accomplished by grants of special privilege. But, in many other instances, non-Hausa were directly assimilated into the ethnic social core itself through intermarriage, classificatory redefinition of social status, and incorporation of children born to slave mothers and free fathers. A significant number of such persons ultimately acquired positions in the titled office structure that ruled Hausa political institutions.

Two important features of Hausa culture helped to blur and mitigate the potentially divisive and conflicting elements that made up the pluralistic social organization. The first was the widespread use of a common spoken language. Not only did the rulers and their rural kinsmen address each other in their native tongue; but all other permanent residents of the states used Hausa as well, at least as a second language when conducting their business affairs in the towns and cities or in their relations with state authorities. This was true in all the city-states and could not, therefore, have resulted from the imposition of linguistic conformity by a dominant political power. More likely, a common Hausa speech, remarkably free from the dialectical variation that would have

made mutual intelligibility difficult, emerged from the stimulus provided by interstate and international commerce in which so many Hausa participated. A thriving commerce depends in part on the ability of those who share in it to understand one another. Those who originated from, or who came to live within, the most important region for West African interior commerce in the period from the fifteenth through the nineteenth century came to employ Hausa as a commercial *lingua franca*. But whether or not Hausa-land's relative linguistic homogeneity is to be explained on the basis of economic factors, the fact remains that such homogeneity did reduce one of the features so prominent in many plural societies: conflict and hostility between those of different languages living under the governance of a common set of rulers.

Islam was the other leading feature of Hausa culture that served to cross-cut ethnic and class distinctions. During the city-state period most, probably the majority, of rural Hausa continued to practice their traditional religion, although incorporating into it selected Islamic elements. Only after the Fulani *jihad* did this basic difference between the religion of the rural Hausa and their rulers provoke general conflict between the two; prior to 1804, however, religious dualism appears to have been generally acceptable to both the sovereign and his subjects since it was the kinship bond which sustained their primary loyalties. Yet from the sixteenth century onward Islam began to provide the dominant cultural orientation for the city-dwelling populations in most of the states. The rulers and a good share of the nobility converted to Islam, a situation which permitted not only amicable but formal ties to be forged between the ethnically differentiated communities that made up the *birni*. Members of the Muslim learned classes were attached to the courts as titled officials of the state while, at the same time, they were allowed to take very direct roles in the internal governance of wholly Muslim wards and quarters. So long as the leaders of the Islamic communities were willing to accept their status as privileged and protected residents without seriously agitating for the stricter application of Muslim law for all citizens then, clearly, Islamic culture served to mitigate potential conflict. The fact that, following the *jihad*, the learned Muslim leadership was no longer willing to abide what they had come to regard as an intolerable dilution of correct Islamic practice was a major contributing factor to the destruction of the sovereign city-state structure in Hausaland.

It is evident, therefore, that the ideal of kin-relatedness as the basis of citizenship was, throughout the

age of city-states, continuously subjected to influences that fostered cooperation among, and helped ward off conflicts between, the diverse groups of differing social origin that together made up the corpus of free citizenry. But the kinship organization remained the bedrock upon which the whole elaborately stratified society rested.

The lowest order of citizens, the peasant-farming *talakawa*, were organized into domestic socio-economic units known as *gandu*. A *gandu* comprised two or more males and their families who jointly operated a farm under the authority of its senior male member who was also the head (the *maigida*) of the residential compound. This individual served as the "legal person" for the whole unit; he bore the responsibility for representing its members before the political authorities, as well as exercising internal control over its affairs.

Within the *gandu*, the *maigida* organized and saw to the carrying out of agricultural tasks. He allocated the farm plots, collected and redistributed the harvest, and insured that seed and tools were made available. His overall supervision extended also to any client groups that might be attached to the *gandu* as well as to its slaves, if it owned any. He was responsible for the welfare of its individual members, reconciling disputes between them, and performing those ritual observances – either traditional or Muslim – that formed part of the annual cycle of festivals or other occasions when performance of religious duties was called for. Should the *gandu* flourish and its members grow too large, various male members and their families might leave the *gida* to set up new *gandu* which, when sufficiently well-established, would be recognized by the political authorities as separate legal entities. This process received formal recognition through the manner in which taxes were levied: tax liability for post-adolescent males began when they still resided in their father's *gandu*, and steadily increased through marriage and the enlargement of their families. To meet this tax demand, the father increased the size of his sons' farm holdings (*gayauna*) every year. When sufficient land had been acquired and a compound constructed to house those who worked it, the new *gandu* was entered upon the tax rolls.

Modern studies have shown that this ideal of the *gandu* consisting of the patrilineal descent group continues to hold great prestige in the eyes of the rural Hausa; however, other features of Hausa social life operated to disrupt it. The high incidence of divorce in a setting where polygynous marriage was a universal ideal; patterns of social avoidance between parents and

their children and between brothers; strong attachments between matrilineal kin in a fundamentally patrilineal society; and economic differentiation resulting from the adoption of specialized occupations (especially commerce) on a full-time basis – all worked to keep the actual numbers of ideally defined *gandu* low. Since these factors were also present during the city-state period, the presumption is that the basic descent group organization at that time was as open to change and transformation as it was when carefully examined by social investigators of a later period. Far from leading to a break-down of "classical" Hausa social organization, these elements of departure from the ideal could just as well have made their contributions to the well-being of the city-states, for they may have encouraged movement from rural to urban areas and participation in the various specialized social and economic sectors (commerce, craft production, and the Muslim intelligentsia) that gave dynamic, growth-producing qualities to the city-states.

Despite the fluidity of social organization suggested here, the role of the *gandu* head remained central to all those areas where those who came under his authority had need to deal with other social units or with the political powers. First among those responsibilities was making provision for the marriage of *gandu* members. Since unmarried adults were considered to be social outcasts (this was especially true for women), the arrangements necessary to provide a suitable mate (cross-cousin marriages were preferred), to secure the necessary sums for bridewealth payments, to arrange for the remarriage of widows and divorcées (both were known by the common name *bazawara*) all fell within the purview of the *gandu* head. He had, in addition, to insure that taxes, fines, and other official levies were paid; to provision feasts; to transmit communications from the political authorities to the *gandu*'s individual members; and to maintain active social relations with the *gandu*'s neighbors.

While farming was the primary activity of the *talakawa*, craft production and other specialized occupations also formed a major portion of the tasks assigned to each male (women generally did not participate in the agricultural labors although, beyond their domestic and child-rearing roles, they performed specialized craft tasks too). Each man was known by a title that indicated his specialist's role: hunter, fisherman, house-builder, weaver, leather-worker, butcher, porter, herbalist, petty trader, and so forth, down a long list. These occupations were performed part-time during the farming season and full-time the rest of the year.

These descriptions of the Hausa *talakawa* obviously differ little from the patterns of social and economic life characteristic of traditional kin-based subsistence societies the world over. But the economic organization of city-state Hausaland had evolved far beyond the traditional subsistence level. Its most distinctive feature was the high degree of labor specialization it had achieved, coupled to a distinct orientation toward production of surplus foods and goods for extensive regional and international markets. The division of labor, and the social forms which it took, were prominently reflected in the presence of craft and occupational guilds.

The artisan guilds possessed their own hierarchies of officials whose chiefs represented their members in the marketplace and with the political authorities. Among the most important craft guilds were those of the ironworkers, dyers, artificers, and leather-workers; specialized occupations included corporate groups of musicians, story-tellers, and prostitutes. In the hierarchical ordering of professions all these were regarded as low in status. The high status end of the occupational spectrum was represented by professions that offered opportunities for acquiring greater personal wealth. Chief among them was that of merchant, whose activities and accomplishments were recognized by the honorific term *kasuwanci*, "successful trading." Together with bankers, brokers, commission agents, clerks, and the like, successful merchants formed something resembling a social class since access to membership in it appears to have been open to individual initiative and was not monopolized by a handful of great families, merchant houses, or a specific ethnic group. The presence of so many foreign merchants in the international trading system of which the city-states formed an integral part must have contributed greatly to maintaining this openness of access. By the seventeenth century the most numerous group among the long-distance traders were the Hausa themselves who in turn pushed the trade routes on toward the forest and coastal regions where they established important Hausa commercial colonies.¹²

Another high status profession comprised the Muslim literate teachers, scribes, and religious officials who, together, were known by the name *mallanci* (corresponding to the Arabic *ʿulema*, "learned ones"). Here again, membership in this "class" was open to aspiring and capable students who had successfully completed the required stages of formal Koranic instruction, regardless of their social origins.

The highest prestige attached to the profession

called *sarauta* (ruling), which included not only members of the aristocratic and noble lineages, but free-born and slave office-holders and administrators as well. While nobility was recognized by the title *sarki* (chief or ruler), commoner office-holders were called *masusarauta* (administrators). *Sarauta* was regarded by the Hausa as a wholly proper full-time occupation. Needless to say, the aristocratic lineages attempted to monopolize high offices by asserting the claim to hereditary rights and by intriguing for the appointment of kinsmen and clients to titled positions where hereditary claims were invalid. As the city-states grew larger and more complex, as competition and warfare between them increased, and as commerce steadily expanded, more elaborate instruments of government were required than could be managed by recruitment from the aristocratic lineages alone. Thus, the *masusarauta* came to form a substantial class of bureaucrats and state officials (which in turn was inherited by and reformed to suit the tastes of both the Fulani and the British rulers of later times). It is equally clear from the histories of the various states that, increasingly, slaves were recruited to fill high offices of the expanding bureaucracy.

Slaves were unquestionably of central importance to the growth and development of Hausa city-state culture. This, in turn, raises major questions: What proportion of the total population was slave? What were their origins? Were they a suppressed lower class, or captives acquired by war, raiding, or purchase? What was the slave contribution to increases in the production of an exportable economic surplus? It is well known that slave labor played a crucial role in basic production, perhaps the predominant one, in the city-states of antiquity. Was the same true of Hausaland? The evidence for the city-state period is inadequate to provide firm answers to these questions. What is known is that the slave component of Hausa society steadily increased throughout the nineteenth century during which the Fulani rulers vastly expanded the slave-raiding enterprise both for the purpose of reexporting slaves in the trans-Saharan trade and, dramatically, to enlarge the labor force at all levels (from agricultural workers to throne servants) (Fisher & Fisher [1971]). But was this true in the pre-*jihad* states?

Demographic estimates can be only wild estimates. The state histories constantly refer to slave-raiding expeditions; to tribute payments paid in slaves; to gifts made by the ruler of one state to another; and to individual slaves, particularly eunuchs, who rendered loyal service to their masters. Therefore, whether or

not the slave populations made up ten or twenty or more percent of the total population appears to be less important a question than those relating to how slaves were regarded and employed. As in later times, many were employed within the states while others became unhappy victims of the apparently insatiable demand of Hausaland's North African trade partners for African slaves. Where Islamic law held sway, the offspring of free fathers and slave mothers could – over relatively few generations – acquire their freedom by the process of absorption into their master's kin group. Others secured protection, if not free status, by the services they rendered to their masters.

The answers to the questions posed here seem to suggest that slaves formed a significant, if unmeasurable, stratum of Hausa society throughout the city-state and subsequent periods; that slaves were acquired mainly by raids upon neighboring non-Hausa groups (particularly the small tribal societies south of Hausaland); that slaves did not form a submerged order of ethnic Hausa; and that slaves were counted among the most valuable possessions an individual or group might own. The value of the slave to the farming kinship unit was that he added to the group's labor force; and, in the case of a woman, that she produced new members for the unit. The special value of the ruler's slaves was built upon the absolute loyalty they owed to their masters in a society where most personal rights were conferred by blood ties. Seen from an economic perspective, slaves undoubtedly added an important dimension to increases in production within the states as well as to the revenues earned when they were sold in international exchanges. On the other hand, nothing in the existing evidence suggests that Hausa society was *fundamentally* a society of masters and slaves. The *talakawa* and other free groups – even when the institution of slavery grew rapidly in the nineteenth century – far outnumbered the slave population.

Rather than slavery, it was a different form of dependent relations that formed the basis of socioeconomic bonds in Hausa society. That bond has been referred to as clientship, an intricate and pervasive set of relationships that linked each individual to a superior in a hierarchical order that reached right up to the level of the monarch. So central was clientship to the social and economic relationships of the free Hausa and resident foreigner groups of the city-states that many commentators have been tempted to describe both Hausa and the later Fulani-Hausa societies as “feudal.”

Sociologically defined, clientship “links individ-

uals of unequal status, fortune, and political position or prospect” in a patron-client relationship that assumes mutual benefits and solidarity of interest between the contracting parties (Smith [1965]). At the lowest level, such contracts were formed between compound heads (the legal persons of Hausa society) and needy men who received from their patrons protection, housing, food and clothing, plots to farm, and even bridewealth for marriage in return for acting as menial servants to their masters, who also paid their taxes. But the system of clientship extended far beyond this level of vassalage and most importantly characterized the relations between men of independent means: this permitted the client to maintain his *mutunci* (manhood and self-respect) while allowing him to perform political and other forms of service to his lord. At the highest levels of society, including the Muslim literati and wealthy merchants, clientship was termed *caffa* (allegiance) and indicated the formal respect extended by these persons to their rulers. Another form of clientship was called *barantaka* and was a more institutionalized linkage between economically independent clients and noblemen who held high political office (or the prospect of acquiring it).

These basic forms of clientship evolved during the city-state period. Constant reference to them is made in the traditional histories. What ultimately gave clientship its “feudal” character may have been a product of the later Fulani times when the new rulers rewarded their loyal clients with “fiefs” – possessions that increasingly became attached to hereditary rights (including both land and political offices). During the era of the autonomous Hausa polities, the chief contribution of the system of clientship must surely have been the role it played in the reconciliation of differences between the various groups that made up the plural society. Every free man, regardless of his social or ethnic origin, through the contract systems of *caffa* and *barantaka* found his place and his protection secured within the social order.

While the harmonization of diverse social units was accommodated to the growing economic structure of specialized labor in the Hausa city-states, it was the elaborate political system of titled offices that gave those states their most distinctive character.

Sarauta: The Hausa Political System

Hausa city-state government was formalized by the system of titled offices – *sarauta* (pl. *sarautu*) – within which the noble lineages sought to monopolize

high offices by providing the chief candidates for the most important positions including the *sarki*-ship, provincial governors, military, judicial, and city administrative officials. Each of these titled offices constituted a distinct, insoluble legal corporation with carefully defined rights, powers, duties, and relations to other offices. Each also possessed certain tangible benefits in the form of specially reserved lands, groups of clients and slaves, horses, praise songs, and so forth. Since noble lineages claiming hereditary rights to office often were subdivided into two or more branches, there was intense intralineage competition between the factions for *sarauta*. Some clerical lineages also attained hereditary rights to office, and these came to form a special branch of the nobility.

While kinship served as the basic legitimizing force which strengthened and perpetuated high political office among a small number of aristocratic lineages, the need to staff new offices as the Hausa government grew more complex began to draw commoner clients and slaves into the system. This would appear to have been an early development, for the old state histories refer to slaves and eunuchs occupying the very highest offices of state as early as the sixteenth century.¹³ At the same time, the basic kinship ingredient of office-holding made the competition between sub-lineages (especially the appointment of clients and slaves) the central reason underlying factional politics in the city-state period. The fact that all offices from the *sarki* downward were also status-ranked meant that competition for new, additional, and better titles was equally intense. The ruler used this competition to award titles to lineages that lacked proper hereditary claims and thus reinforced monarchical power through the parallel system of client patronage.

At the apex of the system were the senior titled offices whose occupants constituted a council of state. These included the *Kaura*, the senior military commander, whose policy-making role and administrative duties made him the equivalent of the king's prime minister. A significant aspect of the *Kaura*'s power was his right to allocate the booty gained in war. Ranged under the *Kaura* were a whole series of sub-officials – normally drawn from the ranks of the *Kaura*'s kinsmen, clients, and slaves – who acted as advisors, tax collectors, messengers, market overseers, and keepers of estates, compounds, and horses. Next in line of importance was the *Galadima*. He, too, served on the high councils of state but had special responsibility as the king's main deputy in relations with the noble lineages. He presided over meetings of the state's princes and princesses and possessed sole

authority for disciplining persons of aristocratic station. His role was central in informing the king about general affairs in the kingdom, and he had direct access to the *sarki* for that purpose. The *Galadima*, through his numerous subofficials, also administered a major quarter of the *birni* in which his compound was located, as well as outlying territories and provinces that were attached directly to his office.

The other titled offices reserved to the nobly born or their appointed clients concerned both men and women. Among the princely titles the most important was that of *Yerima*, or crown prince and designated successor to the ruler. The office was not based on the principle of primogeniture but was filled on the basis of the ruler's choice ratified by the members of the state council. Other princes of the royal entourage occupied lesser offices, and all had direct relations with the *Galadima* who served as their liaison to the *sarki*. Chief among the female titled offices was that of the *Magajiya*, the official queen mother, who though never the biological mother of the reigning king was a senior member of the dynastic lineages. She had responsibility for training the princesses and was always consulted by the *Galadima* in the event that severe punishments were to be administered to members of the aristocracy. Constitutionally, she had the power to recommend to the state council the countermanning of the *sarki*'s orders, including the right to argue for his deposition since she was not required to take an oath of allegiance to the king nor could she be removed from office by him. Since the *Magajiya* had the power to reprieve offenders, she was much sought after as a patron and maintained clientage relations of the sworn allegiance type with numerous persons throughout the state. Lesser ranks of female office-holders had control of appointments and functions related to court life, and many were taken by the king and other senior officials as wives.

Alongside these aristocratic offices at the top levels of state authority were those reserved for Muslim officials. The most senior among them was that of the *Limamin Juma'a* who had direct access to the ruler and sat on the various high councils of state. He presided at the main Friday prayers in the city and was generally responsible for all the members of the clerical community. The next ranking office reserved for Muslims was that of the *Alkali*, the chief judge who presided over court cases involving civil matters (debt, inheritance, marriage, bridewealth, and the like). Interestingly, he pledged his loyalty not to the *sarkin*, but to the *shari'a* (written Islamic law). Severe punishments (execution, banishment, mutilation, etc.)

lay outside his province, for the council of state reserved for itself the sole right to apply these strictures. A third Islamic office was that of the *Dan Sanwai*, also represented by membership on the state council. It was he who acted as the chief among the ruler's scribes and confidential assistants, and was the key figure in those matters that touched the economic activities of the long-distance trading community: he acted as host and protector of foreign merchants, and served, too, as purchasing agent for the court and the royal courtiers. The offices described here were those identified as existing in the Daura state in the eighteenth century; however, in varying configurations they were to be found in all the other states as well.¹⁴ In most cases, the Islamic title-holders successfully converted appointive positions into hereditary office at these higher levels, while the lesser positions tended to remain open to members of the free Muslim citizenry.

Among the free population there were many other titled positions, some of which were reserved to lineages of free commoners and others which were filled without regard to the hereditary principle. The functions they served ranged from collecting tolls on caravans to the command of specialized military units, such as the light cavalry; from acting as the provincial tax collectors of the required grain tithe (*zakka*) to insuring the proper performance of protocol at the court; to overseeing the salt trade and making collections from the merchants specialized in it; and from the supervision of the transport of slaves to regulating the affairs of magicians, musicians, dancers, and the craft guilds.

The highest hereditary offices, including those reserved for *mallanci* (the Muslim intelligentsia), were in most cases secured by bonds of allegiance and pledges of loyalty (with the exceptions noted above). But for the vastly more extensive ranks of junior *sarauta*, the title had also to be purchased (*kudin sarauta*). In the city-state period, prices were reckoned in cowrie shells – the most universal form of currency throughout the *bilad al-Sudan* – and an office such as the *Dan Barau*, collector of the grain tax, might cost as much as 500,000 cowries. As can be imagined, access to office by a wealthy patron who could obtain the appointment and also pay the *kudin sarauta* for a client constituted one of the main ways of acquiring power.

Although they performed immensely important functions in the states, the titled offices of the heads of guilds carried with them relatively little political power. The *Sarkin Pawa* (head of the butchers) also served

as the chief official of the main market. The *Korama* led the grain-sellers; the *Sarkin Dillalai* was the chief of commission brokers; the *Sarkin Makera*, *Bulkaci-ma*, *Sarkin Marina*, and *Magajin Aska* respectively headed and collected the taxes from the blacksmiths, well-diggers, cloth-dyers, and barber-surgeons. Each in turn was linked to one or the other of the senior administrative officials to whom he owed loyalty in the overall hierarchical system. Here again, the problem of reconciling the functions of government and the specialized office-holders who administered them to the Hausa kinship principle was accomplished through the application of the institutions of clientship.

Lying alongside the structure of offices held by aristocratic and free commoner occupants was the other component of the system, the appointment of slaves as both senior throne officials and palace slaves assigned to important duties.¹⁵ First among the senior slave officials was the *Sarkin Yara*, who presided over the administration of the *birni*. He was responsible for the maintenance of public buildings and could commission labor (*corvée*) to see that necessary tasks such as wall maintenance were done. He settled market disputes referred to him by the *Sarkin Pawa*, received the king's taxes collected by the various guild heads, and relayed the ruler's instructions to specific groups. Beyond that, the *Sarkin Yara* had responsibility for administering the provincial towns, which he accomplished through a system of agents (noble, commoner, and slave) who received royal commissions. He presided over the lesser council of state on matters that concerned the entire free population below the level of the noble lineages. Finally, this important slave official served as the *waziri* (roughly, comptroller) who helped establish the actual fees (*kudin sarauta*) required for appointment to titled office. Though he remained a slave by status, his links to his master, the king, were assured by his preferential marriage to one of the king's sisters.

Others among the senior throne slaves had similar, if less sweeping, administrative responsibilities and powers. The *Turaki* was charged with collection of the cattle tax. The *Sarkin Bai* was placed in charge of the palace and the city guards (slaves were always the guardians of the city gates). The *Sarkin Ruwa* supervised and collected taxes on water wells. Lesser throne slaves commanded slave military units, served as police chiefs in the cities, carried out the role of executioner, and managed the prisons. As in the case of Muslim title-holders, these offices of slaves tended to become, over time, hereditary even while slave status remained attached to their occupants.

Palace slaves had correspondingly important ranks with various titled officials who performed guard service, messenger duties, maintenance of the royal treasury, and certain tax collection functions. Eunuchs supervised the royal harems. And craftsmen groups that fabricated the quilted armor (called *lifida*) used to protect both warriors and their horses were under the supervision of a palace slave official.

As can be seen in the foregoing brief description of Hausa political institutions, the main state functions – executive, legislative, judicial – were not presided over by a single, privileged class drawn exclusively from Hausa descent groups. It would appear, to the contrary, that the Hausa rulers managed to craft an enormously complex system of internal checks and balances which included all the major elements of settled rural and urban society (but not the pastoral Fulani) at some level of the system.

Kinship and hereditary privilege stood as the main route to high office; but the complementary systems of clientship and slavery were successfully grafted upon it thus guaranteeing an important avenue of upward mobility for the foreign, commoner, and slave components of society. Since such a system might be regarded as having maximum limits (of both scale and complexity) beyond which it would cease to function efficiently, it is tempting to speculate that the political system described here was beautifully tailored to the city-state form. The scale remained manageable. The ruler and his officials could know at first hand even the most intimate affairs of the kingdom. And, every citizen and subject could regard him or herself as playing a part in the political life of the state through networks of clientship that bound every person to another, superior patron. But this speculation implies that the city-state form ceased to function efficiently because, perhaps, it had begun to expand beyond its “natural” size. Instead, we know the system came to an end as the consequence of a great Islamic revolutionary upheaval led by the Fulani intellectuals, supported by their non-Muslim pastoral kinsmen, and joined by disaffected elements among the orthodox Hausa Muslims.

It is therefore appropriate to take note, briefly, of the growth of Islamic cultural institutions in city-state Hausaland.

Religion and State in the Hausa City-States

Except for the lengthy record of interstate warfare and the struggles of the Hausa states to preserve their autonomy in face of foreign threats, the growth and

spread of Islam is the best known feature of the period from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. The written accounts were mainly those produced by Muslims, both foreign travelers and members of the resident Muslim intelligentsia. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the history of Islam in Hausaland has often served as the *leitmotif* for its historians, both contemporaneous and modern.¹⁶ However, it should also be remembered that Hausa traditional religion was never entirely displaced by Islam – especially in the countryside and in many of the smaller states – even in the period following the Fulani *jihad*. Just as important, as long as the old dynastic system of noble lineages drawn from traditional Hausa descent groups remained strong – as it did throughout the city-state period – it would continue to bind the Muslim ruling groups to their pagan kinsmen. Thus, the history of Islam in Hausaland should be regarded as the gradual appearance of an important new influence, imported initially by foreigners and adopted selectively by rulers as an added element of their authority, that functioned as a militant threat to the old Hausa systems of society and government only at the end of the eighteenth century.

Islamic influence reached into Hausaland from three directions and its agents were, for the most part, merchants and preachers rather than warriors and armies.¹⁷ The *Kano Chronicle*, the surviving written record with the greatest time depth, refers to the first Muslims as *Wangara*, traders in gold and kola nuts from the lands of the Niger Mali empire in the west, who settled in Kano and converted its rulers. The Sarki Yaji (1349-85), it is reported, adopted the faith as a consequence of the advice, prayers, and assistance given him by the Wangara as he prepared to embark on a military campaign. His successors, especially Kano’s greatest early monarch, Muhammed Rumfa (1463-99), vigorously pursued a policy of Islamization during that same time when the great market center was established, the major walls constructed, and successful military campaigns were undertaken to enlarge the state itself.

It was in the course of Rumfa’s reign that the second avenue of Muslim influence was also noted: the arrival of Muslim teachers and preachers from the North African Arab lands who carried with them written texts on Islamic law and religious instruction which were adopted by the local literati both as the basis for institutionalizing the *shari‘a* as a judicial standard for members of the Islamic community and for instructing new recruits to their ranks. Although many examples of the growing interest of Hausa

rulers in Islamic principles of government might be cited, the most famous occurred during the reign of Rumfa when he consulted an internationally famous Muslim jurist, Al-Maghili of Tlemcen (modern Algeria), on what steps a prince should take in expanding the faith. In a treatise entitled *The Obligations of Princes*, Al-Maghili first wrote to Rumfa setting down those practices which a rightly guided ruler should adhere to; and, subsequently, this great authority came with followers to settle permanently in Kano, where they became leading members of the *mallanci*. A similar receptivity to the preaching and instructional writing of North African Muslim literary figures appears in the records of the Katsina and Gobir states as well.

The third direction from which Islamic influence made its appearance was the east. It is associated with the political and economic expansion of the Kanuri state in the Hausa arena. Initially this was indicated in the Abayajidda tradition in which the putative founder of the "legitimate Hausa Seven" was identified as a descendant of the ruling house of the Arab empire at Baghdad, arriving at Daura via Bornu. But, clearly, both the trade and political connections which sustained strong ties between Bornu and Hausaland meant that a regular source of Muslim influence continued to be felt from that direction.

Until the *jihad*, however, Islamic influence remained largely confined to two areas. First and foremost, that large segment of the population devoted to commercial enterprise adopted Islam. While it was initially the culture of the foreign merchant communities, increasingly it became the culture of Hausa merchants as well. As the latter began to spread as groups of traders far beyond Hausaland – south toward what are today the Nigerian forest lands and southwest into the Voltaic regions of present-day Ghana – they in turn became major agents of Islamic diffusion in West Africa. Certainly by the eighteenth century Islamic institutions and practices (the saying of daily prayers, celebration of the major Muslim festivals, use of Muslim jurists, obedience to *Qur'anic* strictures in the conduct of business, and so forth) had come to represent the basic flavor of life in the Hausa capital cities. It barely requires repeating that the leaders of the Muslim merchant and learned communities were thoroughly assimilated to the titled office structure of Hausa political life.

It was in the evolving Hausa forms of government that the second main thread of Muslim influence can be detected. From the time of Sarki Yaji down to the present day, the majority of the rulers professed adher-

ence to Islam. At the same time, as the disgruntled Muslim literati continuously noted in their writings, the *sarakuna* remained very tolerant of pagan (Hausa traditional) religious practices among the majority of their subjects while perfecting Islamic forms as the cult of the ruling classes. This religious dualism, as it has been called, was characteristic of religious life in the city-states right up to the very moment of the Fulani *jihad's* outbreak. Unhappiness with such an impure state of affairs was the major ideological basis upon which the call to *jihad* was proclaimed.

Islam served to reinforce the powers of the autonomous rulers while it helped to organize and expand the growing networks of international commerce. All the while this gradual set of developments was taking place, a rather different set of problems constituted the main issues faced by the rulers of the individual states. These were the problems created by the intense competition between them and by the meddling and invasions of foreign powers. The strenuous efforts put forth to preserve state sovereignty and to enlarge the wealth and power of the state in competition with all the others – foreign relations, in effect – consumed the main energies and attention of Hausaland's rulers.

Warfare and Alliance – Foreign Relations of the Hausa States

While much of the work of internal consolidation remained to be done in at least two of the city-states – Zazzau in the south and Gobir in the north – those of the core region had emerged as full-blown sovereign entities pursuing aggressively expansionist policies by the beginning of the sixteenth century. This was especially true of Kano and Katsina, whose rivalry to rank first among the states in power and control over the lucrative international commerce produced a nearly continuous set of armed conflicts between them until the mid-seventeenth century. But on various occasions others states, particularly Zamfara in the early seventeenth century, also entered the fray by trying to assert a military hegemony over the Western Hausa area. Among the non-Hausa powers whose armies entered Hausaland in the effort to make the states become tribute-paying vassals were the ever-present imperial Bornu (which frequently claimed suzerainty over both the eastern border states such as Daura and the larger core states of Kano and Katsina), the Songhay empire of the middle Niger region (in the early sixteenth century), followed by the break-away Songhay state of Kebbi (through the rest of the sixteenth and into the seventeenth centuries), and, a

dimly-known but potent military state called Kwara-rafa whose raiding armies entered and occasionally devastated large territories belonging to both the Hausa and Kanuri (Bornu) states up through the seventeenth century (*Ahmad ibn Fartuwa* in Palmer [1926]).

These internecine struggles and the conflicts with foreign powers stimulated the growth of military institutions designed for both defensive and offensive uses. The defensive wall systems were enlarged in the main *birni*, more modest earthworks constructed and maintained in the lesser towns, and regular guard forces recruited (frequently from among the slave populations) to man them. The titled ranks of warrior chiefs also grew proportionately: the *Kano Chronicle* recorded the presence of only eight major military commanders during the reign of Muhammed Kisoki (ca. 1582-1618) whereas their numbers had grown to fifty-two in Kano by the middle of the eighteenth century. The danger was always that a particularly strong commander might challenge the authority of the *sarki*, and the written records reflect periods of rebellion and attempted usurpation leading to civil wars in many of the states. Kano, again, provides detailed evidence of the challenge presented to its legitimate rulers by a strong military faction during a civil struggle that raged within the state between the early 1640s and 1652, when the civilian party finally succeeded in suppressing a faction of warlord usurpers.

This need to maintain large and well-equipped military forces, and the consequent enlargement of the class of commanders, who in their turn might become the main disturbers of civil order, may have been responsible for the increasing use of slave generals and lieutenants – officers of the state who owed their loyalty directly to the ruler rather than to the kinship branch from which the ruler was selected. In any case, the state chronicles constantly stress slave-raiding as a major aim of warfare, the incorporation of slaves as one of the large elements making up the armies, and the rise of gifted slave war chiefs to high state office.

However, it was the cavalry that constituted the central military institution charged with carrying out the states' aggressive policies. The cavalry had necessarily to be recruited from among the wealthiest orders of society since horses were acquired more through trade than by local breeding. The commonest currency used to purchase horses (especially from merchants plying the trade to North Africa) was slaves, thus completing the circle of economic interconnectedness that linked slave-raiding to the overall military situation. As indicated in the discussion of

the Hausa political structure, one of the strongest ties that bound high status clients to their lord was the obligation to provide military service. This meant, in effect, providing a horse (arrayed in cotton quilted armor), the grooms and attendants to maintain it, as well as the weapons and personal armor of the warrior himself. Together these represented a heavy tax burden on members of the Hausa nobility.

This system of "feudal" military service remained basically unchanged through the end of the city-state period. It has struck many historians as curious that none of the states experienced a shift in military organization from their basic reliance on cavalry forces to the use of infantry armed with firearms. Muskets and cannon were known in this region of Africa from at least the beginning of the seventeenth century. Neighboring Bornu, through its connections with Ottoman-ruled North Africa, had even imported Turkish instructors to teach the use of such weapons (*ibidem*). Yet the horse-mounted warrior continued to exercise the most important aggressive military functions for the city-states: the opening up and protection of trade routes, slave-raiding, and attacks launched against competitors. The infantry forces were employed for defensive purposes: to defend the cities and to suppress rebellions. Unlike the cavalry, infantry membership was recruited from the commoner orders and the slave groups. Thus the Hausa, like most societies, mirrored in their military forms their social and political organizations. So long as lineage hierarchies remained at the top of the political order and so long as one of the principal obligations owed by noble and wealthy men was to provide their ruler with military service, the role of the *chevalier* held firm. So important was this institution that not even the Fulani, in their turn, did much in the way of substituting musket, cannon, and infantryman for the prestigious occupation of horse-mounted warrior.

Even the barest summary of the military fortunes of the individual states is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, certain main features can be described which help identify shifts in power that resulted from interstate rivalries and periods when foreign influence became pronounced (Hogben & Kirk-Greene [1966] 145-306).

The oldest, fiercest rivalry between city-states plunged Katsina and Kano into a series of conflicts and wars which lasted from the late fourteenth through the mid-seventeenth centuries. During the earlier part of this period Katsina seemed to have the upper hand. As that state lying nearest the major Saharan trade center of Agades – itself recently

having emerged from contests with other rivals as the most important staging location on the trans-Saharan trade route to North Africa – Katsina made strenuous efforts to control all the import traffic to the south. Kano, whose growing prosperity was derived from the expansion of its manufacturing industries and its reasonably successful slave-raiding campaigns into the stateless regions, came to resent the key commercial role which Katsina had assumed. On repeated occasions the armies of the two competitors took to the field with the obvious objective of achieving more complete sway over the trade routes. Although Katsina's forces more than once came up to the very gates of Kano, the city was never taken. Kano's campaigns against the Katsinawa had equally limited success. The stalemate reached by the inability of either to dominate its competitor was finally recognized in 1652, when the two states reached a diplomatic accord that prevented open warfare between them until the end of the city-state period. By that time Kano had replaced Katsina as the largest and most prosperous of the two, a position it never subsequently relinquished.

While the two major rivals were locked in their struggle to achieve mastery over the core lands and the international trade routes, the most important states of the peripheral areas were absorbed with their efforts to achieve stable systems of rule at home and to resist foreign meddling. Zaria entered upon a long age of civil conflict during which rival lineages fought to achieve exclusive rights of *sarauta*. What finally emerged was a complex system of power-sharing between the noble competitors, which made Zaria's political system, at least, rather more open to disruption than the others. The capital itself was shifted frequently and became fixed at its modern location only in the eighteenth century. The armies of the Kwararafa and of Bornu continued to raid across the state and to exact tribute from the Zazzau kings, a situation which may have inspired the dramatic spurt of defensive wall-building there under the sixteenth century queen Amina. But Zaria lay too far south of the contact zone between Hausaland and the Saharan trade routes to vie for place as a premier commercial *entrepôt*. It therefore turned its attention to servicing the international trade by supplying slaves to the Kano and Katsina markets for which it received such precious commodities as salt, metals, and horses. By the eighteenth century the stability of the state had been secured and foreigners were kept sufficiently at bay to have made Zaria an independent power equal to Kano itself.

Gobir faced problems different from those of Zaria

but, at the same time, ones to which the solutions welded together a strong state in the late part of the pre-Fulani period.

The towns of the Gobirawa originally extended up to the Ahir region of the Tuareg. They were the last of the farming populations to abandon the marginal Sahelian zone. By the same token, the Gobir Hausa also occupied strategic locations which each of the great imperial powers – Songhay in the sixteenth century and Bornu throughout – tried to control. Inevitably Gobir was forced to pay tribute to, or if possible, strike up an alliance with one or another of the competing parties. This situation changed after the first third of the sixteenth century when Kebbi, a small state that successfully rebelled against the Songhay overlordship, entered the picture as an important buffer between Songhay and the Hausa states. For nearly a century Kebbi proved strong enough to demand tribute from most of its Hausa neighbors and acted as the virtual suzerain over Gobir. However, Kebbi's rule was challenged in the seventeenth century by Zamfara, which strove in its turn for mastery over western Hausaland including all of Gobir and important districts of Katsina. The effort finally collapsed since the technique of alliance was never successfully employed.

Gobir, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, was entering upon a period of stability and growth.¹⁸ Its military structures developed in response to the various foreign powers which had attempted to rule it. As it increasingly came to be the guardian state to which fell the responsibilities of protecting the whole region from the desert nomadic warrior groups, as well as keeping the trade routes open and safe for Hausa and North African merchants, Gobir became the Hausa crucible within which so many of the contradictory elements of the city-state were forced to work themselves out in the direction of new solutions. As perhaps the most ethnically pluralistic of all the states, Gobir had constantly to contend with the presence of Tuareg, Fulani, and other non-Hausa groups within its borders, all of which were attempting to define their own structures in an independent fashion. This had the effect of stimulating the development of strong military institutions which, geared at first toward the tasks of defense and political consolidation, might subsequently be turned toward more aggressive, expansionist policies. Not itself a major Hausa market and craft production center on the scale of Kano, it nonetheless occupied one of the key roles in facilitating Hausa commerce by protecting the northern trade routes. And, finally, Gobir became the

scene of significant proselytizing efforts by Muslim propagandists and reformers. In retrospect, it is not surprising that, when the ultimate challenge to the city-state system did appear in the early nineteenth century, it struck first in Gobir state.

Conclusion – Strengths and Weaknesses of the Hausa City-States

Uthman dan Fodio, a Fulani *mallam* who resided in Gobir and may have tutored its crown prince in the ways of Islamic learning, appeared in the late eighteenth century as the Muslim “Sword of Truth” (Hiskett [1973]). He became increasingly disaffected from his patron, the Sarkin Gobir, whose levy of unjust taxes upon his fellow Fulani and coreligionists and whose willingness to tolerate many traditional Hausa customs and practices that varied significantly from the laws set forth in the *shari‘a* caused Uthman to preach and to write against such abuses. He withdrew from the *birni* to establish a new settlement where followers and disciples came to receive instruction from the master teacher. The disciples soon organized their forces to resist the *sarki*’s efforts to compel obedience to the state authorities. Military conflict erupted between the two factions; and, while reaching indecisive conclusions at first, news of this rebellion quickly spread throughout Hausaland and was received by many members of the Muslim community and by merchants and even non-Muslim Fulani as a welcome message of hope that they, too, might free themselves from the unjust demands of their rulers. With astonishing rapidity rebellious leaders appeared in all the city-states and each in turn journeyed to Uthman’s fortified camp to receive the great teacher’s blessing to carry the *jihād* back to their homes. At the same time they pledged their formal allegiance to what was clearly a new patron, the *amir al-muminun*, Chief of the Believers. In 1804 the *jihād* had been carried inside the walls of Gobir and its ruler was forced to flee. In 1807 Kano fell. By 1812, all the main *birane* had fallen under the sway of Uthman’s authority. His sons became the actual administrators of a new empire, the Caliphate, with a new capital, Sokoto. The age of the Hausa city-states had definitely ended.

What appears as most striking in this story is not that the city-states finally succumbed to the power of a superior, imperial order of rulers. What is surprising is that they endured for so long. For at least three hundred and fifty years the autonomous Hausa polities had managed not only to withstand the efforts of

neighboring imperial powers such as Songhay and Bornu to dictate their affairs and exact tribute from them, but they also managed to grow large, prosperous, and largely powerful in their own right. To do so they crafted systems of government and society which skillfully drew from the majority of ethnic Hausa obedience to a highly structured and complexly interlinked authority system which was repeated in each of the states. Perhaps of even greater significance was the fact that this fundamentally Hausa system, which had evolved from the earliest groups of kin-related farmers, was able to assimilate and adapt so many non-Hausa peoples and ideas to it: foreign merchants, Muslims, and pastoral Fulani.

The proof that this process did succeed is made the more convincing by what the Fulani rulers set about to accomplish upon their accession to power: they grafted an imperial structure on top of the Hausa city-state system but were largely content to leave the social and political orders intact. Hausa titled offices were given Muslim names (for example, the imperial ruler came to be referred to as the *Sarkin Musulmi*), while the Fulani and some of their Hausa allies came to monopolize the highest of those offices.

The main strengths of the Hausa city-states derived from at least three sources. First, the region where they took root was relatively rich in resources. Rainfall and fertile soil were adequate to sustain successful agriculture and widespread animal husbandry. Their food surpluses permitted large numbers of the population to take up specialized full-time tasks: craft manufacture, commerce, warfare, government, and religious occupations. Furthermore, in the pre-city-state period this complex Hausa economic base was allowed to develop in reasonable isolation from the tumultuous imperial politics of its western and eastern neighbors. Indigenous, localized economic growth was an important precondition for the Hausa city-state form. When, after the Hausa were drawn fully into a wider, international economic world – as was the case from the sixteenth century onward – the individual polities easily accommodated themselves to the new economic opportunities without necessarily having to abandon their political form. Competition was waged between some of them, such as Kano and Katsina, to gain a larger share of the wealth from commerce and the sale of their own economic surplus. But no state became essentially predatory upon that commerce and sought to disrupt it. Otherwise, some of the states found themselves in a favorable position of economic symbiosis with the others – such as Zaria, supplier of slaves to the large northern market cities.

The second great pillar upon which the successful Hausa city-state system was built was its elaborate socio-political system. The core of each state was represented by the population of ethnic Hausa, each of whom had his or her identity as a full citizen affirmed by ties of blood that linked the humblest to the most mighty. Clientage reinforced this linkage, and titled office-holding gave it concrete expression. So long as the scale of any polity remained manageable – that is, so long as the kinship ties could retain the appearance of direct contacts between rulers and ruled – the city-state served its people well.

But the Hausa city-states comprised much more than successful export-oriented economies presided over by large kin-related groups. They were, all of them, plural societies containing large non-Hausa elements. Perhaps the greatest strength of all was therefore represented by the capacity of the basic system to assimilate new features and outsiders. The largest such group, the pastoral Fulani, were allowed to remain outside the rigorously hierarchical socio-political system so long as they continued to maintain peaceful relations of economic exchange with the agricultural society. Foreign traders, too, represented an opportunity rather than a threat to the city-states and were suitably linked to the Hausa rulers through the system of clientage. The need for more workers, warriors, and loyal government servants increased as the city-states expanded, and the institution of slavery developed to satisfy that need. As these were either captives or purchased persons and not a submerged class of ethnic Hausa, they, too, could gradually be assimilated into the social and political systems. And finally, Islam first appeared in Hausaland not as a dangerous foreign ideology but as the religion and culture of the merchants. Since it posed no immediate threat in the political sense, its obvious values (literacy, refined legal codes, and positive connections to the great centers of international commerce) could be adopted selectively without creating unwanted disruptions in the basic political institutions. Until such time as the religious reformers began preaching against such tolerant practices, Islam served to support and clarify the character of city-state life, not to undermine its institutions.

The weaknesses embodied in the city-state form are equally apparent in the Hausa case. While the Hausa states succeeded for the most part in maintaining their independence from foreign rule, they never ceased to wage struggles among themselves. Too great a proportion of state wealth was spent on defensive requirements: walls are virtually the hallmark of city-

states, but they are enormously costly to build and more expensive still to maintain and garrison. Furthermore, in a region where the presence of tse-tse fly makes the breeding of horses difficult, the excessive reliance upon cavalry (with its accompanying requirement of purchasing horses) drained off enormous wealth. Yet military service of the “feudal” type constituted a central feature of the political order without which the system of clientage at the highest levels would have possessed significantly less substance. War booty, especially slaves, did add to the revenues of states that developed strong armies. But the need to use those same armies in the internecine struggles probably neutralized such benefits. Central, then, among the weaknesses of the Hausa city-states was the endemic military rivalry between them occasioned by the determined efforts of each to remain independent of the others.

The other principal weakness was probably inherent in the very concept of the city-state. That was the problem of scale. If a single state appeared to grow so successful as to enlarge the extent of its territory, it could only do so by encroaching on the territories of other states. When such policies were pursued, either alliances had to be formed or conquests firmly secured by the imposition of the successful ruler’s agents as governors of the new lands. Zamfara, among others, sought to accomplish this type of forceful expansion and consolidation and failed in the effort, for other than its military strengths it lacked a secure home base to which the new possessions could be attached. Other city-states in other cultures finally lost their independence through just such a process in which the strongest among them finally imposed its rule over traditional rivals and created the basis for either a territorial state or an empire. In Hausaland a different result followed.

It was neither through foreign conquest nor through the triumph of one state that the Hausa city-state period was brought to an end. Perhaps no greater testament to the vitality and durability of the Hausa city-states can be made than to state that the Fulani reformers and their Hausa allies retained the basic features of life and organization within the states when they deprived them, finally, of their cherished local independence.

Appendix

Hausa City-States from 1450 to 1804

– A Bibliographical Up-date

Since the appearance of my chapter on the Hausa city-

states in Griffeth & Thomas (1981), Nigerian and Western scholars have produced a substantial body of scholarship on Hausa history, polity, culture, and economy. None of this body of work significantly alters the characterization of the Hausa city-state cultures between the years 1450 and 1804 as originally presented. Nor has any major primary documentation been discovered in the written, oral tradition, or archaeological record that would indicate that the main Hausa city-states were either something different from what emerged in the record compiled from the accounts of contemporary visitors such as that of Leo Africanus in *The History and Description of Africa* (Pory [1956]) or the late 19th and early 20th century texts assembled by Palmer (1928).

However, reinterpretations of that body of data have, in some instances, seriously challenged the main themes which those earlier authors chose to employ. Most importantly, a school of interpretation developed among scholars and students at Ahmadu Bello University in Northern Nigeria which argues that Western political and cultural models (including the city-state model) were inappropriate to the analysis of pre-*jihād* Hausaland, since the main theme should be the early and continuous development of Islamic culture and institutions rather than a focus on a presumed distinctive (ethnically differentiated) Hausa culture. From this perspective only the political fragmentation of the pre-*jihād* Hausa polities would suffice as evidence of city-states, whereas the culture of the region, its religious and intellectual transformation, and many of its main economic institutions (the long-distance trade diaspora throughout the Western Sudan and into the forest and coastal areas as well) were of vastly greater significance than the atomized polities. Since most of the written documentation which describes pre-1804 Hausaland is based on the works of literate Muslims who resided there, were instrumental in the long-distance trading networks, and occupied important positions even within the local political hierarchies, then this view holds that it would be inaccurate to draw a picture of Hausaland which does not make the evolution of Islamic institutions the main theme. The eyewitness accounts of the earliest European visitors, such as that of Denham, Clapperton, and Oudney (1826), are thus by implication regarded as having less value than they might otherwise possess since they impose a "Eurocentric" rather than an Islamic viewpoint on what was viewed and described.

The development of what is sometimes termed the "Islamic legitimist school of historical interpretation"

is more fully described by Lovejoy (1986). Professor Abdullahi Smith and many of his graduate students at Ahmadu Bello University have been the main proponents of this reinterpretive perspective. An impressive number of theses on varying and individual subjects, particularly the history of Kano, have been produced from this source largely by employing the Islamic perspective discussed here. These are to be found in Barkindo (1983) and (1989).

One document, in particular, has figured strongly in the revisionist issues: *The Kano Chronicle*, which was first included in Palmer's *Sudanese Memoirs*. Last, one of the founding scholars at Ahmadu Bello University undertook a "deconstructionist" interpretation of the *Kano Chronicle*'s authorship (1980) and reached the conclusion that it was the copy of "a free compilation of local legends and traditions drafted in the mid-seventeenth century by a humorous Muslim rationalist" and was not in fact a chronology of the rulers of Kano from c. 1000 to the reign of *amir* Muhammed Bello in the 1880s, as was thought to be the case by Palmer. M.G. Smith assessed this interpretation in an article entitled "The Kano Chronicle as history," in Barkindo (1983). More recently Hunwick (1994) undertook a detailed analysis of the text based on the internal evidence of Arabic and Hausa usage. He concludes that "we have to say that the optic through which Kano history is viewed by the KC is one that belongs to a vantage point of the closing years of the nineteenth century, rather than any vantage point closer to the events it describes, as Murray Last and M.G. Smith have proposed. Murray Last wanted us to read KC with the malam's sacred geography and mythology in mind. While what may be called the malam *Weltanschauung* did play a role in the shaping of the KC, it may be more important to read it with the political history of nineteenth-century Kano in mind, and especially the political history of the 1880's" (p. 143). That 19th century history, of course, unfolded as the imposition of Fulani/Hausa *jihād*-based institutions of rule over the Hausa city-states which had preceded them.

In any event, Hunwick (1993) also provides a very thorough survey of all the work done on Kano history (including that on its Hausa neighbors).

A second reason why the city-state model has not been embraced by some scholars proceeds from their view that the primary significance of pre-1800 Hausa history lies not in the atomized polities which seemed so distinctive to visitors who ventured inside their walls as in the truly vast spread of Hausa merchant communities throughout so much of the Central

Sudan and the forest zone. This theme was initially developed by Adamu (1978). He concluded that it was the “economic and cultural heritage [that] the Hausa people bequeathed to millions of West Africans” which holds over-riding importance. At the same time he states that “the Hausa are known to have developed one of the best systems of local government in West Africa.” For the pre-1804 period Adamu describes a “multi-centered state system in Hausaland, in contrast to the unicentered system of Borno [and] was of major social and economic benefit to the country because it gave rise to more centres of development than otherwise and therefore faster development through competition. After 1804 the political scene in Hausaland changed completely and dramatically” (p. 14). The perspective offered here would seem to indicate that the author believes something akin to a city-state culture and political system existed in the pre-*jihad* era (the “multi-centered state system”), but does not regard that as the most salient feature of the Hausa. For Adamu, it was the spread of the Hausa language (still the most widely spoken tongue in West Africa), Hausa economic activities, and the exportation of its local governmental institutional forms outside core Hausaland that represent the important story and not the record of city-states in the pre-*jihad* era.

Further on the Hausa as central figures in Central Sudanic systems of trade can be read in the many contributions of Paul E. Lovejoy beginning with his PhD thesis (1973) and many subsequent detailed studies importantly including the role of slavery and the slave trade.

Overall, the fullest account of scholarship on the pre-*jihad* Hausa states conducted since 1980 may be consulted in Laya (1992). While not explicitly identifying the Hausa as a city-state culture, Laya does generally maintain the descriptions to be found in those basic texts and documents which do.

This brief review of the past twenty years of scholarly inquiry into Hausa history and culture – the bulk of it by Nigerian historians – thus does not reveal anything which seriously contradicts the general picture provided in the contemporary documentation, travelers’ accounts, or detailed examinations of individual states (see M.G. Smith’s works on Zaria, Daura, and Kano). The city-state model as it is being developed by Mogens Herman Hansen (*supra* 16-19) it seems to me properly applies to the situation in Hausaland in the 1450-1804 period. The various revisionist interpretations discussed here (and others not discussed, such as the always popular Marxist class analysis approach) do not so much refute the city-state model

as they simply dismiss it as an appropriate focus of scholarly attention.

Notes

1. *Acknowledgements.* I wish to thank Mr. A. H. M. Kirk-Greene of Oxford University for providing me with a thorough vetting of the Symposium Paper, particularly his kind assistance in correcting the many improper Hausa usages which appeared in the original treatment. He also provided me with valuable guidance to key scholarly works on Hausa history which have appeared over the past twenty years. I am also grateful to Symposium participant Paul Sinclair of the University of Uppsala who gave the Symposium paper a careful reading and critique. Sinclair’s insights and comments are greatly appreciated, as are those provided by the other Symposium participants during the presentation session.
2. Historians have relied mainly on two sorts of literary sources to document the establishment and growth of the Hausa city-states. The first of these consist of local traditions, written mostly in Arabic by members of the resident Muslim communities. Many of these records are compiled in the work of the British colonial administrator, H.R. Palmer, *Sudanese Memoirs* (1928). The second variety of written documentation consists of North African travelers’ accounts, of which Ibn Khaldun’s fourteenth century chronicle, *Histoire des Berbères* (de Slane [1925-6]) and Leo Africanus’ sixteenth century account *The History and Description of Africa* (Pory [1956]) contain critically important evidence. Currently, scholars are working intensively with other written documents and collected oral traditions to sketch a more detailed picture than is available in the standard accounts. See the Appendix: *Hausa City-States from 1450 to 1804 – A Bibliographical Up-date* (503-5). This appendix also contains a brief discussion of conflicting schools of historical interpretation some of which reject the validity of treating pre-1804 Hausa culture as a “city-state culture.” Serious archaeological research on Hausaland has barely begun.
3. The Fulani *jihad* has received deep and careful study. Perhaps the best account of the foundation of the Caliphate remains Last (1967).
4. This perspective may be found in Trimmingham (1962), which continues to retain its place as a major study of West African Islamic history.
5. Sutton (1979). The earlier views may be found in Smith (1964) and Smith (1976) 158-64, 183-201.
6. Sutton (1979). See also *Appendix* on the revisionist interpretation advanced by the “Islamic legitimist school of historical interpretation.”
7. The version of the legend presented here is drawn from Palmer (1928) III: 132-4. Scholarly commentary on this text and many other centrally important documents of Northern Nigerian history may be found in Thomas Hodgkin’s magnificent anthology (1975). See also Hallam (1960).
8. The treatment of state formation among the Hausa Bakwai and the Banza Bakwai is found in Hogben & Kirk-Greene (1966). This detailed study has been up-dated to include 20 subsequent years of scholarship on the Hausa and was reissued by Gregg Revivals in 1993. See in particular Part III, 7, “Emirates Deriving from the Hausa States,” 145-306. The basic document which has stirred interpretive controversy (see *Appendix*) in recent years is the “Kano Chronicle,” in Palmer (1928) III.

9. On traditional Hausa religion, a leading work continues to be Greenberg (1946).
10. Denham, Clapperton & Oudney (1826) is the first thorough European travel account of Hausaland. It contains a wealth of ink drawings, including sketches and surveys of the Kano *birni*.
11. This section on Hausa society and economy as well as the following section on political organization draw heavily upon the work of Professor M.G. Smith, perhaps the outstanding contemporary authority. Although Smith writes as an anthropologist, he takes great effort to preserve an historical perspective, especially where distinctions are drawn between pre-Fulani and post-*jihad* Hausa social and political organization. Smith has provided a very terse set of descriptions in (1965) "The Hausa of Northern Nigeria". Detailed, full-scale treatments of three major Hausa states may be found in Smith (1960) *Government in Zazzau 1800-1950*, (1978) *The Affairs of Daura* and *Government in Kano, 1350-1950* (1997). On Hausa as a plural society, see Kuper & Smith (1969) 91-151.
12. On the vast expansion of Hausa long-distance trade communities, see various contributions in Meillassou (1971).
13. Certainly the best studied case of Hausa state politics and factional competition in Smith (1960). Office-holding slaves are described in the earliest texts, such as "The Kano Chronicle."
14. Consult *The Affairs of Daura* for a complete breakdown of the titled office. Structure and the relations of offices to each other. On office-holding by slaves, consult *A Chronicle of Abuja* (Hassan & Shu'aibu Na'ibi [1952]).
15. Two chapters in Ajayi & Crowder (1976) present good surveys of Islamic influence in Hausaland during the city-state period. They are Hunwick (1976), and Adeleye (1976). The earlier works of Trimmingham (1962) regards the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a period of Islamic regression in Hausaland.
16. See *Appendix* for discussion of scholars who have taken a different view from that presented here on the Islamic role in Hausa history. Their interpretation is referred to as "the Islamic legitimist school of historical interpretation."
17. The main outlines of these struggles are presented in the chapters by Hunwick (1976) and Adeleye (1976), see *supra* n. 15. More detailed treatments can be found in Hogben & Kirk-Greene (1966) 106-16. "The Sudan in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries".
18. The tangled histories of Gobir, Kebbi, and Zamfara have been partly straightened out by Sutton's reassessment of Hausa cultural origins. See especially (1979) 192-5.

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