

# 8/Agrarian Societies: Part I

*You have put your head inside a wolf's mouth and taken it out again in safety. That ought to be reward enough for you.*  
Aesop (from *The Wolf and the Crane*)

IN TRACING the early history of mankind, V. Gordon Childe has directed attention to two great social revolutions, both of which profoundly altered the character of human life.<sup>1</sup> The first of these resulted in the formation of the first horticultural societies. The second gave rise to the first agrarian societies.

This second revolution had its beginnings five to six thousand years ago in the fertile river valleys of the Middle East. Subsequently it spread both east and west, with the result that by the end of the fifteenth century A.D. agrarian societies were firmly established throughout most of Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and South and East Asia. With the discovery of the New World, this form of social organization was

<sup>1</sup> See V. Gordon Childe, *Man Makes Himself* (London: Watts, 1936), especially chaps. 5 and 7.

brought to North and South America, though here somewhat variant forms came into being because of the peculiar circumstances of settlement.<sup>2</sup>

This second great social revolution of antiquity was made possible by a variety of factors, the most important of which was a series of inventions and discoveries that resulted in major advances in production, transportation, and communication. Prominent among these were the invention of the plow and two related developments which greatly enhanced the value of the plow, namely, the discovery of how to harness animal energy, and the discovery of the basic principles of metallurgy. The latter made possible the forging of iron plowshares (a great advance over their wooden predecessors). As Childe puts it:

The plow heralded an agricultural revolution. Plowing stirs up those fertile elements in the soil that in semi-arid regions are liable to sink down beyond the reach of plant roots. With two oxen and a plow a man could cultivate in a day a far larger area than can a woman with a hoe. The plot (or garden) gives place to the field, and agriculture (from Latin *ager*, "a field") really begins. And all that means larger crops, more food, and expanding populations.<sup>3</sup>

Paralleling these developments were the inventions of the wheel and the sail, which greatly facilitated the movement of both men and goods. This complex of events laid the foundation for the eventual emergence of a new type of society which, though it has been given other names, I shall refer to as the agrarian society, in recognition of the distinctive character of its subsistence system.

#### **Agrarian Societies: A Generic Type?**

Despite the fact that various societies have had a common agrarian economy, many scholars deny that they constitute a distinctive social type. Such men stress the innumerable differences among them, and often point out that in the last analysis each agrarian society is a unique entity in its own right. Where, they ask, does one find any true counterpart of such distinctive institutions as the imperial Chinese examination system, the Turkish Janissary system, or the medieval Catholic Church? This point of view has been expressed so often and skillfully by able historians and area specialists that it cannot be ignored.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See James G. Leyburn, *Frontier Folkways* (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 1935), especially chap. 11, for an excellent discussion of the consequences which ensue when advanced societies are transplanted in a primitive wilderness.

<sup>3</sup> Childe, *Man*, p. 100. Quoted by permission of C. A. Watts & Co., Ltd.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted, however, that not all historians share this extreme view. In the last generation especially, a number of very able historians such as Marc Bloch, M. M. Postan, and Ralph Turner, to name but a few, have insisted that general patterns of fairly broad scope and fundamental historical significance do exist.

No one can deny the real and important differences among societies with agrarian economies, or even that, when viewed in their totality, each constitutes a unique entity. However, the same can be said of everything we refer to in generic terms. Terms such as "chairs," "people," "atoms," "galaxies," "cells," "sonnets," and even "historians" all refer to aggregations of units which are far from uniform. Despite this, experience has shown it intellectually rewarding, even essential, to employ concepts such as these. The basic issue involved in deciding whether or not to use generic concepts is one of balance: are the similarities among the units more significant than the differences, at least in those matters which are relevant to the problem at hand? If so, the use of the generic term is justified.<sup>5</sup>

For purposes of the present analysis, there seems sufficient justification for treating agrarian societies as a generic type. When viewed in the perspective of all human societies, the similarities clearly outweigh the differences. Once again, however, it should be said that this is not to deny the existence of internal variation or even the possibility that important subtypes exist.<sup>5a</sup>

There is, however, a real need to differentiate between agrarian societies and one other type with which they are easily confused because of geographical proximity and long historical association. These are *maritime* societies. They include such famous groups as the Phoenicians, the Carthaginians, the Venetians, and the Dutch from the mid-fifteenth

<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that all criticisms of the use of general concepts are based on ignorance or prejudice. Far from it. Often criticisms have arisen because of the misuse of such terms. Sociologists and others who use them sometimes forget that identity in certain respects does not imply identity in all. Societies which are very similar in some ways may vary greatly in others. By failing to recognize this and make it clear in their writings, they convey the impression of a naive, one-sided, and grossly oversimplified view of human life.

In their defense, however, it might be said that, even when the nature of this problem is clearly understood, it is extremely difficult to present a truly accurate picture which exaggerates neither the similarities nor the differences among units. This is especially difficult when quantitative data are lacking.

<sup>5a</sup> In response to an earlier draft of Chaps. 8 and 9, Robert Bellah argued vigorously for the need for internal differentiation of this societal type. He suggested that it might be far more fruitful to differentiate between "simple" and "advanced" agrarian, with the watershed being the first millennium B.C. He argued that these simple agrarian societies more closely resembled the most advanced horticultural societies than they do the more advanced agrarian. He feels that the key developments were the great social and cultural inventions of the first millennium, e.g., universal religions, alphabetic writing, bureaucracy, coinage, etc. He also notes that this is roughly the same period in which iron tools became common, but feels that this is not the crucial development (a view which I do not share). I believe this division may well prove useful in the future, and the reader will probably note that most of the data cited in this chapter are drawn from societies which would qualify as "advanced" agrarian, just as most in the last chapter were drawn from the more "advanced" advanced horticultural societies. Bellah also argues for a differentiation of agrarian societies into three subtypes, city-states, bureaucratic empires, and feudal regimes, which crosscut one or both of the previous types.

century. One might regard Athenian society from the sixth century B.C. until the period of Roman rule, and perhaps also English society from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, as examples of hybrid societies, part maritime and part agrarian.

Maritime societies differed from agrarian societies in various ways. From the productive standpoint, commerce rather than agriculture was the chief source of the economic surplus. This characteristic was undoubtedly related to the further fact that, in the political and distributive spheres, merchants were much more favorably situated in maritime societies than in agrarian. Also, the governments of maritime societies were typically republican and plutocratic, while those in agrarian societies were usually monarchical.<sup>6</sup> From the military standpoint, maritime societies were distinctive because of their reliance on naval forces, a characteristic which had important implications for both the political and the distributive spheres. Other differences might also be cited, but these should prove sufficient to indicate the need for differentiating between the two types.<sup>7</sup>

### Common Features of Agrarian Societies

Societies which depend on agrarian economies resemble one another in many important ways, and it is to these points of similarity that we now turn. To begin with, in matters of *technology and production* agrarian societies clearly enjoy a definite advantage over the other three types of societies we have considered. The gulf which separates them technologically is substantial, indicating that the productive potential of agrarian

<sup>6</sup> For a further discussion of this point, including a consideration of some of the exceptions, see pp. 197-198 of this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> The need for this distinction between agrarian and maritime societies had not occurred to me when I began work on this volume, but I was driven to it by research. Recently I discovered, while rereading Franz Oppenheimer, that he was forced to the same conclusion half a century ago. See *The State*, translated by John Gitterman (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1914), chap. 4.

In reading this section Robert Bellah pointed out that the distinction between maritime and agrarian societies was *economic* rather than technological, and, further, that this should be the basis of distinction elsewhere. Reflecting on this, I am inclined to agree, though with the qualification that differences in the economies of societies are normally linked with and dependent on differences in their technologies. This is clearly the case in the five major types of societies with which the volume deals. Economy and technology diverge to a significant degree chiefly in special cases when varying environmental conditions force a society to concentrate on certain aspects of technology to the neglect of others, or make this advantageous. Thus certain societies which possessed a knowledge of the basic elements of agrarian technology found it more profitable to concentrate their economic efforts in overseas trade and commerce and thus became maritime societies.

societies is, on the average, considerably greater than that of the others.<sup>8</sup> This difference is best indicated by the superior engineering achievements of mature, or highly developed, agrarian societies, which are unmatched in any horticultural society. These include such marvels as the great cathedrals built in medieval Europe, the massive pyramids of Egypt, the far-flung irrigation systems of the Middle East, India, and China, the roads and aqueducts of Rome, the countless palaces and temples of South and East Asia, the Great Wall of China, and even the modest ships and wheeled vehicles common to all agrarian societies except in the earliest periods.<sup>9</sup>

These many and varied achievements rested in part on the foundation of countless small advances in technology and science too humble, in many instances, to be noted by historians in their day. These include the development of new tools and the refinement of old,<sup>10</sup> the development of new skills and crafts, the cultivation of new varieties of plant life and the domestication of new kinds of animals, the harnessing of new forms of energy, and countless advances in both scientific and technical knowledge. The net effect of all these innovations was the substantial enlargement of the economic surplus. Under agrarian conditions of life, far less of the total product of man's labor was required to keep him alive and productive, and hence more was available for other purposes.

Advances in productive technology were matched by advances in military technology. The means of waging war were substantially more efficient in agrarian societies than in horticultural. For example, the domestication of the horse and the invention of the wheel made possible chariot warfare and cavalry warfare, both significant advances. Other

<sup>8</sup> I do not mean to suggest that there is no overlap with respect to productivity between some of the most primitive agrarian societies and some of the most advanced horticultural. As noted in the last chapter, there is reason to think that from the standpoint of productivity the most advanced kingdoms in pre-European Africa and the New World equaled or surpassed the societies of Western Europe of the early Middle Ages and perhaps also the earliest, and most primitive, agrarian societies in the Middle East and China. It should be recognized, however, that these comparisons involve the least developed examples of one category and the most developed of another. What we are chiefly concerned with is the overall range and distribution of cases within each category, and it is this which appears to be quite distinct.

<sup>9</sup> Some of the most advanced horticulturalists in the New World approached agrarian societies in some respects. The greatest achievements of the Incas, Aztecs, Mayas, Toltecs, and others, especially in the realm of massive-style architecture and engineering, approximate their counterparts in early agrarian societies. The differences are most pronounced where delicate and complex feats of engineering are involved. Thus, in even these most advanced of horticultural societies, there is nothing to compare with the great medieval cathedrals or the Taj Mahal.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, the description of typical farm tools in a Chinese village as reported by Martin C. Yang, *A Chinese Village: Taitou, Shantung Province* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), pp. 251-257. This should be compared with corresponding descriptions for horticultural societies.

advances included the development of castles and other kinds of fortifications, protective armor, and improved weapons.

For the student of stratification and distribution, these developments in military and productive technology are vitally important for two reasons. In the first place, the advances in military technology created an important social cleavage. No longer was it possible for every man to make for himself weapons as good as those of every other man. The new technology favored those who either controlled enough manpower, e.g., slaves and serfs, to build fortifications, or possessed enough wealth to hire the specialists required to build the new equipment like chariots and armor. Thus, for the first time in history, technologically based differences in military might became a basic reality within human societies, and opportunities for exploitation were correspondingly enlarged.

Advances in technology, in the areas of both production and warfare, also made possible a substantial growth in the power of the state. This possibility was not always realized, as evidenced by Europe during the early Middle Ages, but when it was, the results could be most impressive. Compared with the governments of horticultural societies, those of agrarian societies tended to be more powerful, more efficiently organized, more permanent, capable of more impressive accomplishments, and engaged in a wider range of activities.

One measure of the power of any state is the size of the territory it controls. A few examples from the history of agrarian societies help point up the contrast between agrarian and horticultural societies. From the standpoint of territory, the Russian Empire surpassed all rivals. As early as the reign of Peter the Great (1689–1725) it embraced nearly six million square miles, and in the reign of Alexander II in the mid-nineteenth century, nearly eight million.<sup>11</sup> Its nearest rival seems to have been the Spanish Empire of the eighteenth century, which contained a land area of five million square miles.<sup>12</sup> In the middle of the eighth century the Arab Umayyad Empire reached the zenith of its power and controlled a territory in excess of three million square miles.<sup>13</sup> The Roman Empire at the height of its power held sway over a land area of two million square miles, as did the Chinese Empire from the Han dynasty on.<sup>14</sup> Finally, the

<sup>11</sup> Jerome Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia from the Ninth to the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 278.

<sup>12</sup> This can be readily computed from a standard map of the Spanish Empire at that time and a table of current national land area.

<sup>13</sup> This figure is based on a map in Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (London: Macmillan, 1960), p. 216.

<sup>14</sup> See Ralph Turner, *The Great Cultural Traditions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1941), vol. II, for maps showing the approximate boundaries of these two empires.

Ottoman Empire, at the peak of its power under Suleiman the Magnificent (1520–1566), contained more than a million and a half square miles, as did the Persian Empire in its heyday and the short-lived empire of Alexander the Great.<sup>15</sup> While these are admittedly extreme cases, they illustrate the potential for growth inherent in agrarian states. Furthermore, there have been scores of other agrarian states with territories ranging from a hundred thousand square miles to well over a million. By contrast, few horticultural states ever attained the lower limit of this range.<sup>16</sup>

Population size is another measure of the power of states and also of the capacity of their economic systems. Whereas the upper limit for advanced horticultural states has been only about four million, populations of a hundred million and more were recorded for a few agrarian states, and states with populations in the millions were the rule rather than the exception. In China, a population of more than 60 million was recorded in the census of 1578, and by 1778 it had increased to 243 million.<sup>17</sup> The first census in Russia, taken in 1724, indicated a total population of only 14 million, but by the time of the tenth census in 1858, this figure had increased to 74 million.<sup>18</sup> The population of the Roman Empire is estimated to have totaled 70 million at the beginning of the third century.<sup>19</sup> Again, these are extreme cases, but they reveal the contrast between the potentialities of agrarian and horticultural societies.

As these examples suggest, the great agrarian states of the past were all conquest states, or social units formed through the forcible subjugation of one group by another.<sup>20</sup> The same has probably been true of all, or virtually all, their lesser rivals. Few, if any, agrarian states ever came into

<sup>15</sup> For the Ottoman Empire, see Hitti, map opposite p. 712. For the Persian Empire of the classical period, see A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. xx–xxi, or Turner, p. 362. For the empire of Alexander, see W. H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West* (New York: Mentor, 1965), map on p. 363.

<sup>16</sup> The Inca Empire, for example, though one of the largest created by an advanced horticultural society, covered an area of only about 350,000 square miles. See Victor von Hagen, *The Ancient Sun Kingdoms of the Americas* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1961), pp. 576–577.

<sup>17</sup> Wolfram Eberhard, *A History of China*, 2d ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 274. As early as A.D. 140 there may have been nearly 50 million inhabitants (p. 108).

<sup>18</sup> Blum, *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> *The Cambridge Ancient History* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1939), vol. XII, pp. 267–268.

<sup>20</sup> One scholar said of the Romans that “war must be ranked with agriculture as a major industry.” See F. R. Cowell, *Cicero and the Roman Republic* (London: Penguin, 1956), p. 287. This statement could be applied to most other great agrarian states.

being simply through the peaceful political evolution and expansion of a single people or through the voluntary federation or union of separate peoples.<sup>21</sup>

As a consequence, agrarian states are often made up of a variety of disparate ethnic groups. Those groups which remain politically united for a number of generations frequently tend to merge culturally, as in the case of the various ethnic groups which made up the English and the Chinese populations. Sometimes the distinctions disappear entirely, but this is not inevitable, as evidenced by the enduring cultural cleavage between the Greeks and Romans, which outlived the Roman Empire, or those ethnic distinctions which have been perpetuated for centuries in India in the form of certain castes.<sup>22</sup>

Warfare was a chronic condition in virtually all agrarian states. A generation ago Pitirim Sorokin undertook a massive survey of the incidence and magnitude of war in the histories of eleven European countries. For the period covered by his survey, Germany had the lowest incidence of war, with wars recorded for 28 per cent of the years from 1651 to 1925; Spain had the highest incidence, with wars being reported in 67 per cent of the years from 1476 to 1925.<sup>23</sup> The median figure for the eleven countries was 46 per cent, reported for Russia for the period from 901 to 1925. Though this study includes a few years of the modern industrial era in some cases, there is no reason to think that this raised the totals in any way. On the contrary, it probably lowered them. Furthermore, there is good reason to believe that if Sorokin's figures err, they err on the conservative side, due to his failure to take account of minor conflicts not reported in the sources he used.<sup>24</sup>

When struggles with foreign enemies were lacking, *internal struggles* often developed. This was especially common in nations without an insti-

<sup>21</sup> A record of conquest cannot necessarily be found in the history of every agrarian state. Sometimes states appeared on the stage of history for the first time only when they had already reached a stage of stability or decline, thus creating the illusion of a nonconquest state. When a state contains more than a handful of villages, however, as is invariably the case in agrarian societies, we can strongly suspect that conquest did occur in the prehistoric and preagrarian era.

<sup>22</sup> Not all castes have an ethnic origin, but modern research indicates that many do. For a good study of the ways in which tribes have been transformed into castes, see F. G. Bailey, *Tribe, Caste, and Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960).

<sup>23</sup> Pitirim Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (New York: Bedminster Press, 1962, first published 1937), vol. III, chap. 10, especially p. 352.

<sup>24</sup> Compare, for example, Sorokin's figures for Russia during the Tatar era with those reported by Alexandre Eck, *Le moyen âge russe* (Paris: Maison du Livre Etranger, 1933), cited by Blum, p. 59. See, also, the statement of Marc Bloch that after the collapse of the Carolingian state, Europe lived in "the state of perpetual war." See Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, translated by L. A. Manyon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 160.



tutionalized pattern of succession to the throne, as in both the Roman and Mughal Empires. Of the seventy-nine Roman emperors from Augustus to Romulus Augustulus, no less than thirty-one were murdered, while six others were driven to suicide, four were forcibly deposed, and several others met uncertain ends at the hands of internal enemies.<sup>25</sup> In the Roman Empire, these struggles were often little more than palace coups, but in the case of the Mughals, the emperor's death usually signaled the beginning of an extended period of civil war between large and well-organized factions, each supporting rival princely claimants to the throne.<sup>26</sup>

The high incidence of war seems related to another characteristic of agrarian societies, namely their pronounced inclination toward *monarchical government*. As various writers have pointed out, the exigencies of war generally make it advantageous to vest ultimate authority in the hands of one man.<sup>27</sup> Committee rule is much less effective, especially in a large and far-flung organization. Given the frequency of war and the size of agrarian states, monarchical government becomes almost inevitable.

There have been a few exceptions to his general pattern, as illustrated by the Roman Republic and the republican governments of the Swiss cantons and certain of the early Indian and Russian states. It is noteworthy that in all of these cases one or more of the following conditions obtained: either the state was small, or it existed when agrarianism was still relatively new in the region in which it was located, or it was located in a mountainous region. As noted above, the advantages of monarchical rule for military purposes are positively correlated with the numerical and geographical size of a society, so that republican government may not be an insuperable handicap for small agrarian states—especially if other conditions are favorable. It also seems that republics can survive more easily in the earlier stages of agrarianism, before empire building by other states has really got underway. This is simply another way of saying that it takes time for the processes of social selection to weed out the less powerful organizations. Finally, mountainous regions seem better suited to the survival of republican governments than riverine valleys and broad plains. There are several reasons for this. To begin with,

<sup>25</sup> These figures were calculated from A. E. R. Boak, *A History of Rome to 565 A. D.*, 3d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1943) and Harold Mattingly, *Roman Imperial Civilization* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1959), using Mattingly's list of emperors on pp. 351-355.

<sup>26</sup> For a good summary of Mughal history, see *The Cambridge History of India* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1937), vol. IV.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology* (New York: Appleton, 1897), vol. II, part 5, chap. 17; Pitirim Sorokin, vol. III, pp. 196-198; or Stanislaw Andrzejewski, *Military Organization and Society* (London: Routledge, 1954), pp. 92-95.

the economic surplus is usually small in such areas, and because transportation problems are acute, it is difficult to assemble in one area a quantity sufficient to support a royal retinue. Furthermore, military tactics which are successful in valleys and plains frequently prove impractical in mountainous areas, thus affording the less numerous and less centrally organized inhabitants of such areas certain advantages when they are forced to defend their own territory.<sup>28</sup>

The history of Roman society provides an especially interesting test case for this line of analysis, both because it is so well documented and because it is so familiar. It seems more than coincidental that the shift from the Republic to the principate was linked with the growth in size of the state, the maturation of the agrarian social order in the Mediterranean world, and the expansion of the Roman state to include vast nonmountainous territories. In short, the emergence of the principate apparently depended on the decline of those conditions favorable to republican government. Having said this, however, one must concede that on the basis of these three factors alone, the Roman Republic should have disappeared long before Augustus or even Sulla, the first violator of the republican constitution and the first practitioner of the monarchical principle. The explanation for the protracted survival of republicanism in Rome seems to be related to the unique institution of the consulship, an elective office of limited tenure but with monarchical powers.<sup>29</sup> This office seems to have provided the Roman state with most of the military advantages of monarchical rule while permitting the retention of most of the essential features of republican rule.

Another important characteristic of agrarian societies was the regular and widespread occurrence of *urban communities*. As indicated in the last chapter, urban or semiurban communities were found in *some* of the most advanced horticultural societies, but in *many* they were absent. Furthermore, those that were found in these societies were few in number, small in size, relatively impermanent, and otherwise deficient in most of the basic attributes of urbanism.

In agrarian societies, by contrast, there was a substantial increase in the number, size, permanence, and urban character of such communities.

<sup>28</sup> Systematic study may indicate that agrarian states located in mountainous regions are sufficiently different from those located in river valleys and plains areas to justify treating them as a totally different category, e.g., "mountain-agrarian" and "riverine-agrarian" societies. For purposes of this chapter, however, I have simply treated them as subclasses within the general class of agrarian societies, their differences being a function of the influence of mountainous conditions. The further I have pursued this subject, however, the more impressed I have become with the magnitude of the differences associated with a mountainous environment.

<sup>29</sup> For a good description of this unusual office, see Cowell, pp. 166-171.

It was the rare exception which lacked truly urban centers.<sup>30</sup> The roster of agrarian cities included such famous names as Babylon, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome, Constantinople, Paris, London, Baghdad, Delhi, Benares, Peking, and Edo (or Tokyo), to mention but a few. According to the best available evidence, a number of these great cities of the past attained populations of several hundred thousand. It is possible that the greatest even reached and passed the million mark for brief periods, though recent research makes this seem more doubtful than formerly.<sup>31</sup> But even if one accepts a half million as the upper limit for city size in agrarian societies (a figure few, if any, experts would challenge), this still represents a tremendous increase over anything in advanced horticultural societies.

Though a few capitals of great empires sometimes attained such size, the majority of urban centers were always much more modest. For example, in the late fourteenth century, London still had a population of only 30,000 to 40,000, and the next largest cities, York and Bristol, had less than 10,000.<sup>32</sup> In the middle of the next century Frankfurt had only 8,700 inhabitants, Nuremberg 20,000, Strassburg 26,000, and Brussels 40,000.<sup>33</sup> In this period a town of 20,000 was considered large, and the great majority of urban centers had less than 10,000. In the mid-sixteenth century, the second largest town in England, Bristol, still had a population of only 10,500, while in seventeenth-century Sweden the second largest had only about 5,000.<sup>34</sup> Even as late as the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the Industrial Revolution was already under way, there were less than fifty cities in the entire world with a population of 100,000 or more.<sup>35</sup>

As such figures suggest, the urban segment of agrarian populations was never more than a small percentage of the total. Russian records indicate that from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century, the

<sup>30</sup> There are a few instances of agrarian societies in which urban communities were wholly or largely absent, as in parts of early medieval Europe when the breakdown in the political system led to the near disappearance of urban life. Also, in the earliest stages of the transition from horticulture to agriculture, urban settlements may sometimes have been absent or few in number and small in size. These cases, however, are by no means typical. The normal pattern in reasonably mature agrarian societies involves a multiplicity of fairly large and relatively permanent urban centers.

<sup>31</sup> For good discussions of this subject, see Kingsley Davis, "The Origin and Growth of Urbanization in the World," *American Journal of Sociology*, 60 (1955), pp. 429-437; J. C. Russell, "Late Ancient and Medieval Population," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 48 (1958), pp. 37-101; and Gideon Sjoberg, *The Preindustrial City* (New York: Free Press, 1960), pp. 80-85.

<sup>32</sup> J. C. Russell, *British Medieval Population* (Albuquerque, N. Mex.: University of New Mexico Press, 1948), p. 285.

<sup>33</sup> Henri Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe* (New York: Harvest Books, n.d., originally published 1933), pp. 170-171.

<sup>34</sup> Russell, *British*, *ibid.*, and Eli F. Heckscher, *An Economic History of Sweden*, translated by Goram Ohlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 111.

<sup>35</sup> Davis, "Urbanization," p. 434.

urban population constituted only about 3 per cent of the total, and in 1851 still totaled less than 8 per cent.<sup>36</sup> In England in the late fourteenth century, towns with 3,200 or more constituted less than 5.5 per cent of the population.<sup>37</sup> Henri Pirenne states that in the whole of Europe, Western as well as Eastern, the urban population probably never constituted more than 10 per cent of the total between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries.<sup>38</sup> More recently, Gideon Sjöberg has argued that in all the agrarian societies of the world, urban populations never constituted more than 10 per cent of the total, and in some instances accounted for less than 5 per cent.<sup>39</sup> Regardless of the exact figures, all authorities agree that the overwhelming majority of the population in agrarian societies were always simple peasant farmers, and city dwellers and townsfolk never more than a small minority.

Despite this fact, the residents of urban centers usually dominated agrarian societies politically, economically, religiously, and culturally. This is because both wealth and political power were normally concentrated in the cities<sup>40</sup>—or, to state the matter more accurately, concentrations of population developed where the holders of wealth and political power resided. Thus, though urban populations were always numerical minorities in agrarian societies, they typically exercised a decisive influence in those areas of life most readily subject to conscious human control.

Urban populations in agrarian societies were not only larger than those in advanced horticultural societies, but also more truly urban. In many ways the largest communities in horticultural Africa resembled overgrown villages more than cities, and horticultural pursuits were still a major economic activity. By contrast, in the leading urban centers of agrarian societies, agricultural pursuits, though not absent by any means, were clearly a secondary activity. The residents of these centers, therefore, were relatively free to engage in other types of activity.<sup>41</sup>

The cities and larger towns of agrarian societies have long been noted

<sup>36</sup> Blum, pp. 268 and 281.

<sup>37</sup> Russell, *British*, p. 305.

<sup>38</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>39</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>40</sup> Sjöberg calls attention to this fact while attacking the popular notion that the elite in agrarian societies resided in rural areas (*ibid.*, pp. 110-116). Although I think he overstates his case, at least as it applies to Europe, his basic argument is surely sound.

<sup>41</sup> It would be a mistake to suppose, however, that a complete divorce was effected. As late as the sixteenth century the weavers of Norwich were obliged to drop their work at harvest time each year, and even in London the hustings court was suspended at harvest time. Even a market town such as Leicester still supplied most of its food from adjoining fields. See S. B. Clough and C. W. Cole, *Economic History of Europe* (Boston: Heath, 1941), p. 48; W. G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant: The Economic and Social History of a Leicestershire Village* (London: Macmillan, 1957), p. 175; and G. G. Coulton, *Medieval Panorama* (New York: Meridian Books, 1955, first published 1938), pp. 282ff.

for the diversity of vocations followed by their inhabitants. Among the major occupational categories represented, the following deserve note since, collectively, they included the great majority of the urban population: officials, priests, scholars, scribes, merchants, servants, soldiers, craftsmen, laborers, and beggars. In addition, there was usually a small leisure class, whose livelihood was derived from rents, pensions, profits, or political office.

Most of these major categories included a great variety of subspecialties, so that a listing of all the many specific occupations would number in the hundreds in the larger cities. Some indication of the diversity found in larger cities is revealed by a survey made in one small neighborhood in Peking early in the present century. In this neighborhood, which had a population of only 5,200 men, no less than 163 different occupations were represented.<sup>42</sup> While a few of these were the result of Western industrial influences, the great majority were traditional occupations of the type found in every agrarian society. If a larger portion of the city had been surveyed, an even greater number of occupations would have been found, since in such cities there is a tendency for workers engaged in the same trade or industry to cluster together.<sup>43</sup>

A similar pattern is indicated by a tax roll for Paris in the year 1313. This roll lists 157 different crafts, not to mention other occupations.<sup>44</sup> The textile industry provides some idea of the degree of specialization achieved. "There were wool merchants, flax merchants, hemp merchants, wool combers, wool spinners, silk spinners (two kinds), weavers (seven kinds for linens, woolens, tapestries of two sorts, canvas, silks of two sorts), dyers, fullers, calenderers, shearmen, textile sellers (of several kinds), tailors (four types, and two more were added in the course of the fourteenth century), headdress makers (seven kinds, including those who worked especially with felt, fur, wool and cotton, flowers, peacock feathers, gold embroidery and pearls, and silk), girdle makers, mercers (who sold articles of dress especially for women), and secondhand clothes dealers." While this same degree of specialization could be found only in larger cities such as London, Bruges, and Florence, smaller cities often had forty or fifty different kinds of craftsmen, and even small towns had ten or twenty.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Sidney D. Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1921), pp. 326-327.

<sup>43</sup> Eberhard, p. 197, reports that there were 420 different guilds in nineteenth-century Peking. However, this may include guilds performing the same function in different sections of the city.

<sup>44</sup> Clough and Cole, p. 25.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* See also Blum, who reports that a recent Russian scholar found as many as sixty craft specialties in some of the Kievan Russian towns of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (p. 16), and over two hundred in the sixteenth century (p. 126).

Work units in urban centers were generally quite small by modern standards. In Cicero's day a shop employing fifty men was considered very large.<sup>46</sup> A pewter business which employed eighteen men was the largest mentioned in any of the medieval craft records of London, and this modest size was not reached until the mid-fifteenth century.<sup>47</sup>

In most agrarian societies, men engaged in the same field of economic activity were organized into local groups which modern scholars commonly call guilds.<sup>48</sup> Actually, these organization varied so much that it could be argued that the same term should not be applied to them all. Some were chiefly religious and fraternal organizations, others primarily political and economic in character. Some were the creations of governmental authorities concerned with problems of social control and taxation, while others were the creations of workers and merchants concerned with the promotion of their own special interests.<sup>49</sup> Typically, however, they served the interests of both the state and their members. For example, the Japanese historian Takekoshi says of the early *za* that "they consisted of merchants granted the monopoly right of business and were the unit of responsibility for the payment of taxes."<sup>50</sup>

Though superficially resembling modern labor unions, these guilds were more nearly associations of merchants and manufacturers, especially those who were politically influential. Membership was usually open to workers as well as employers, but the employers normally dominated the organization by virtue of their wealth, prestige, and power. Distinctions were made even among the employers, and control of an organization normally passed to the wealthiest.<sup>51</sup> In medieval Europe, and

<sup>46</sup> Cowell, p. 80.

<sup>47</sup> Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1962), p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> There have been exceptions to this general pattern, as in Russia, where the guild system was never firmly established despite the efforts of Peter the Great and several of his successors in the eighteenth century. See Blum, p. 302. Prior to the sixteenth century the guild system seems to have been absent in China, and prior to the fifteenth century in Japan. See Eberhard, *History*, p. 197 and Yosoburo Takekoshi, *The Economic Aspects of the History of the Civilization of Japan* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), vol. I, chap. 18. In India castes seem to have performed some of the usual functions of guilds, but did not preclude them by any means. See R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *The History and Culture of the Indian People* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951, 1953), vol. II, pp. 601-602, and vol. III, pp. 592-593.

<sup>49</sup> For examples of the former, see Russia in the eighteenth century (Blum, p. 302, or Valentine Bill, *The Forgotten Class: The Russian Bourgeoisie from the Earliest Beginnings to 1900* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1959), pp. 72-73) or Rome in the third century A.D. (Boak, pp. 369-370). The medieval European guilds are good examples of the latter, which is the more common pattern, though these, too, were often used by public authorities as instruments of social control. See Sylvia Thrupp, "The Guilds," in *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1963), vol. III, p. 232.

<sup>50</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 242-243.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Thrupp, *London*, pp. 23 and 29-31.

perhaps elsewhere, these organizations were more democratic in the earlier years of their existence than in the later.<sup>52</sup>

One of the major concerns of most guilds was to protect their members against interference by outside authorities. Thus guild officers often sought and obtained the right to settle disputes among their own members and otherwise to regulate their conduct. Sometimes, notably in medieval Europe, guildsmen collaborated in efforts to free urban communities from the control of the landed aristocracy or the crown and thereby brought into existence republican islands within the framework of the larger monarchical system.<sup>53</sup> It seems more than coincidental that the political dominance of merchants in medieval European towns fostered the same republican pattern found in maritime societies, where merchants were also dominant.

The tendency toward increased specialization and greater division of labor, so evident within the cities and towns of agrarian societies, also manifested itself on other levels in most of these societies. Different communities and different regions tended to specialize, to a greater or lesser degree, in particular types of economic activities. In the Roman Empire, for example, North Africa and Spain were noted as suppliers of dried figs and olive oil, Gaul, Dalmatia, Asia Minor, and Syria for their wine, Spain and Egypt for salted meats, Egypt, North Africa, Sicily, and the Black Sea region for grain, and the latter also for salted fish.<sup>54</sup> There was also a substantial division of labor at the community level as indicated in a passage from Cato the Elder's manual for farmers, written in the second century B.C. He wrote:

Tunics, togas, blankets, smocks and shoes should be bought at Rome; caps, iron tools, scythes, spades, mattocks, axes, harness, ornaments and small chains at Cales and Minturnae; spades at Venafrum, carts and sledges at Suessa and in Lucania, jars and pots at Alba and at Rome; tiles at Venafrum, oil mills at Pompeii and at Rufrius's yard at Nola; nails and bars at Rome; pails, oil urns, water pitchers, wine urns, other copper vessels at Capua and at Nola; Campanian baskets, pulley-ropes and all sorts of cordage at Capua, Roman baskets at Suessa and Casium.<sup>55</sup>

The Roman Empire was by no means unique in this respect. Reports of similar patterns of specialization come from widely scattered societies in

<sup>52</sup> See James Westfall Thompson, *Economic and Social History of the Middle Ages* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1928), pp. 790-791, or L. Halphen, "Industry and Commerce," in Arthur Tilley (ed.), *Medieval France* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1922), pp. 189ff.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Thompson, pp. 779ff.; Joan Evans, *Life in Medieval France* (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), pp. 64ff.; Coulton, chap. 24; or Thrupp, *London*, chap. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Turner, p. 911.

<sup>55</sup> Cowell, p. 79. Quoted by permission.

the agrarian world.<sup>56</sup> Even at the village level a measure of specialization was not uncommon, since in the agricultural off-season peasants were frequently obliged to turn to handicrafts to make ends meet, and in time certain villages developed a reputation for superior skill in the production of some particular commodity.

The development of specialization necessarily implies the development of trade and commerce, since specialists must exchange the products of their labors for those of others. Comparing advanced horticultural and agrarian societies, it is clear that with only a few exceptions the volume of trade and commerce is substantially greater in the latter.<sup>57</sup> One of the clearest indications of the growth of trade is the emergence of a distinct merchant class as a normal part of almost every agrarian society.<sup>58</sup> This class is found in only rudimentary form in horticultural societies, where the few middlemen interposed between producer and consumer are usually either tax collectors and other government officials, or part-time traders, as in the case of the women of Dahomey.

Though the volume of trade in agrarian societies was substantially greater than in horticultural societies, it could not begin to compare with that in industrial societies. One basic reason for this was the high cost of transporting goods, especially overland. A report from China, prepared shortly after World War II, indicates the relative costs of modern and traditional means of transportation. The cost of shipping a ton of goods per mile by various means was found to be as follows (in United States cents):<sup>59</sup>

Rail	2.7
Animal-drawn cart	13
Pack mule	17
Wheelbarrow	20
Pack donkey	24
Pack horse	30
Carrying by pole	48

For water transportation, the modern steamboat was able to haul goods in China at a cost of 2.4 cents per ton-mile, compared with 12 cents for the

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Blum, pp. 126 and 394-395 on Russia, or Ralph Linton, *The Tree of Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), p. 231 on China.

<sup>57</sup> Once again the early medieval period in Europe is the chief exception to the general rule and for the reasons set forth in footnote 8, page 193.

<sup>58</sup> See Michael Postan, "The Trade of Medieval Europe: The North," in *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1952), vol. II (1952), pp. 168ff. for an excellent discussion of the development of the merchant class in western Europe.

<sup>59</sup> John Lossing Buck, *Secretariat Paper No. 1: Tenth Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations*, Stratford on Avon, 1947, reprinted in Irwin T. Sanders et al., *Societies around the World* (New York: Dryden Press, 1953), p. 65.



traditional junk. As these figures indicate, modern means of transportation have cut the costs of hauling goods 80 to 95 per cent. It is this which has made possible the massive movement of men and materials which characterizes all modern industrial societies. Lest these figures from China be thought unrepresentative, it should be noted that comparable figures from Europe are strikingly similar. For example, in 1900 the cost of transporting goods by horse-drawn vehicles is reported to have been ten times greater than moving the same goods by railroad.<sup>60</sup> In most agrarian states these costs were further increased by the traditional practice of collecting internal customs, i.e., tariffs charged at certain provincial boundaries.<sup>61</sup>

Because of these high costs, only luxury items were usually transported long distances.<sup>62</sup> Objects such as silks and spices were small in bulk but commanded high prices, and thus could be moved for extended distances at a profit. Bulky items of limited value were usually moved only short distances and traded in local markets. In fourteenth-century England, for example, records suggest that costs incurred in transporting heavy commodities like grain a distance of 50 miles would equal 15 per cent of the total cost, whereas the movement of wool the same distance would only be 1.5 per cent.<sup>63</sup> In some instances, transportation costs for foodstuffs were so great that it was more profitable for rulers and their courts to travel to the various estates where they were produced than to transport them elsewhere.<sup>64</sup> The English historian Coulton states that "we see sovereigns and great nobles all through the Middle Ages, travelling from one estate to another with [their] ministers and trains: eating up the year's produce in a week or few days, and then passing on to eat up a fresh estate."

Medieval Europe was not typical in this respect. Normally, in agrarian societies, the economic surplus was carried to the ruling classes and their dependents. As a result, all of the more advanced agrarian societies resembled a tree or plant with a system of feeder roots spreading over a vast area, tapping the surplus and moving it, by stages, to the ultimate consumers, the urban population. At the outer limits of this system were thousands even hundreds of thousands, of small peasant villages, each

<sup>60</sup> Clough and Cole, p. 445.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, Michael Postan, pp. 133-140 on northern Europe; Blum, p. 127 on Russia; Harold Mattingly, p. 221 on Rome; or Majumdar, vol. II, p. 605 on India.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Clough and Cole, p. 64; or Pirenne, chap. 5.

<sup>63</sup> Postan, p. 152.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Sidney Painter, *The Rise of the Feudal Monarchies* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1951), pp. 130-131; or Coulton, p. 47, who reports that this was true even of the great emperor Charlemagne. See, also, D. D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the History of India* (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1956), p. 283, who reports a similar pattern in the Gupta Empire in India.

typically containing a few hundred residents.<sup>65</sup> These transmitted their surplus to some neighboring market town, where a portion was removed for the needs of the local population and the remainder sent on to some provincial capital. Again a portion was removed and the remainder transmitted to the national capital. Those villages in the immediate environs of provincial and national capitals dealt directly with these centers. However, regardless of whether the relationship was direct or indirect, the basic pattern was the same. On the one hand there was a steady flow of goods from the peasant villages to the urban centers. In return, the villages received certain services of a political, cultural, religious, educational, and commercial nature, together with a small number of necessary or desired commodities such as salt, tools, or other manufactured objects not produced in the villages themselves. Thus these relationships which developed between the villages and the urban centers were essentially symbiotic in character, but with definite overtones of parasitism.<sup>66</sup>

Because of the importance and complexity of these symbiotic relationships, those most dependent on them, the city dwellers and ruling classes, were obliged to devise ways to control and regulate them. Two inventions of profound significance emerged from these endeavors—money and writing.<sup>67</sup>

The invention of money certainly proved a great stimulus to trade

<sup>65</sup> Coulton states that the average population of European villages in the fourteenth century varied from 200 to 400 or 450 (p. 68). Another writer suggests 300 as the average for English villages of this period. See H. S. Bennett, *Life on the English Manor: A Study of Peasant Conditions, 1150-1400* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1960). Russell's data from the English Poll Tax Returns of 1377 suggest an average of only 100 in that year, but this was just after the ravages of the Black Plague. Russell estimates the pre-Plague average was about 166 (see *British*, p. 309). Blum reports systematic data from mid-nineteenth-century Russia which show that 53 per cent of Russian villages had between 51 and 300 residents, with the median apparently being about 150 (p. 506). In India today there are about 500,000 villages, and as recently as 1951, despite the influence of industrialism, villages with a population of less than 500 were the most numerous. See Ashish Bose, "The First Census of Free India," *Modern Review*, 95 (1954), p. 114. Finally, a recent study of village life in northern Thailand indicates that the average village in that area has a population of 450 to 500. See John E. de Young, *Village Life in Modern Thailand* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1958), p. 12.

<sup>66</sup> This relationship was parasitic to the extent that the military superiority of the urban-based elite forced villagers to yield more of their crops or to accept less in return for them than they would have if the two parties had bargained from a position of equal political strength. However, since villager participation was not simply a function of coercion, the relationship cannot be regarded as purely parasitic.

<sup>67</sup> In Mexico the invention of writing preceded the invention of the plow, and the same may also have happened in the Near East. In both instances, however, the societies involved were *highly* advanced horticultural societies, which suggests that the invention of writing is linked with this general stage of technological development. Furthermore, it should be noted that though writing is found in a handful of horticultural societies, it is found in virtually all agrarian.

and commerce, providing small, easily portable objects of high value and in universal demand.<sup>68</sup> No longer need a producer seek out a person desiring the specific goods he had produced, or accept as payment goods for which he had no personal use or ready customers. With the development of monetary systems, the door was opened to the emergence of the specialized role of merchant and middleman.

Besides facilitating the movement of goods and increasing the volume of trade and commerce, money also proved extremely significant from the standpoint of distribution and social control. Where money is not known, there are severe limits on capital accumulation and hence on social inequality. As one writer put it, "when wealth began to be measured in the compact and imperishable medium of silver, these limits were removed. The wealthy could store up all the silver they could amass for as long as they liked."<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, with the development of monetary systems, debts could be extended further and moneylending could provide yet another instrument for controlling the peasants and separating them from the surplus they produced.<sup>70</sup> Though this was not the intent of those who devised the first monetary systems, it proved a highly rewarding by-product for the privileged classes.

It would be a mistake to suppose, however, that money entered into the daily life of the average agrarian society with anything like the frequency evident in modern industrial societies. On the contrary, in the rural areas especially, the use of money was an infrequent experience, particularly for peasants.<sup>71</sup>

Writing, like money, initially developed as a response to the increasingly complex economic problems faced by the urban classes in early agrarian societies.<sup>72</sup> If contemporary archaeologists are correct, it had its origin in the efforts of Sumerian priests to keep an accurate set of records of the numerous business transactions in which their temples were engaged. Like money, however, it soon became an instrument of social control as well as an aid to business enterprise. In particular, it provided a means of increasing the efficiency of systems of political administration.<sup>73</sup> In fact, it has become the foundation of every true bureaucracy.

<sup>68</sup> For a good brief review of the origin and early diffusion of monetary systems see either Turner, pp. 263-265, or A. T. Olmstead, pp. 186-191.

<sup>69</sup> A. Andrewes, *The Greek Tyrants* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), p. 82.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, Cowell, pp. 95ff. on Roman society in the third century B.C.; Pirenne, pp. 102-106 on medieval Europe; or Takekoshi, vol. I, pp. 74 and 95 on eighth-century Japan.

<sup>72</sup> For an excellent discussion of the origin of writing, see Childe, *Man*, pp. 143ff. See also footnote 67 above.

<sup>73</sup> See Turner, p. 315.

Writing also served to widen the traditional gulf between the ruling classes and the common people by introducing a major cultural distinction between the literate minority and the illiterate majority.<sup>74</sup> In agrarian societies *limited literacy* was the rule, a pattern setting these societies apart from both preliterate horticultural societies and largely literate industrial ones. As a result, the cultural unity of agrarian societies was seriously weakened, and a divided cultural tradition emerged. On the one hand there was what one historian has called "the high intellectual tradition," which included the sacred literature of the dominant faith, together with the great works of philosophy and literature, standards of honor and etiquette, and all other elements which were a part of the life of the literate minority.<sup>75</sup> Contrasted with this was "the low intellectual tradition" of the common people, filled with practical matters of peasant technology, primitive superstition, and characterized by a highly parochial view of the world. The high intellectual tradition tended to be a common denominator uniting the privileged classes in all parts of the nation; the low intellectual tradition, by contrast, was usually a divisive force, inculcating a narrow parochialism which viewed with suspicion all that was unfamiliar.<sup>76</sup>

Roughly paralleling the cultural cleavage between the literate minority and the illiterate majority was a second cleavage which divided the urban minority from the rural majority.<sup>77</sup> The way of life in these two types of communities was so very different that those raised in one typically appeared foolish when confronted with even commonplace problems of the other. This gave rise to the often pointed humor about "country bumpkins" who could not find their way about in the city, and "city slickers" who appeared stupid in a rural setting.

Before concluding this brief characterization of agrarian societies, something must be said about *the religious situation*. This is an especially difficult subject to deal with because the differences among societies often appear to loom much larger than any similarities. Sometimes it almost seems that generalizations about religion in agrarian societies are impossible. Compare, for example, the tolerant religious pluralism of the Chi-

<sup>74</sup> In those occasional cases where rulers were not literate, they always employed the services of men who were.

<sup>75</sup> See Turner, pp. 317-323. See also Marc Bloch, chap. 5 and especially p. 77.

<sup>76</sup> For an excellent discussion of the interrelations between these two cultural traditions, see McKim Marriott, "Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization," in *Village India: Studies in the Little Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 171-222. Marriott emphasizes the integrating role of the higher tradition more than the divisive role of the lower.

<sup>77</sup> The parallel was less than perfect because there were always large numbers of illiterate workers in the cities and towns and a small number of literate teachers, officials, priests, landowners, or even prosperous peasants in the rural areas.

nese Empire during parts of its history with the rigorous attitude toward dissent displayed by the leaders of ancient Israel at certain stages, or by most of the Christian and Islamic societies of a later era. Or compare the weakness of the priestly class in China and Rome with the great strength of their counterparts in India or medieval Europe.

Nevertheless, despite such variations, certain patterns have been evident in the great majority of agrarian societies. To begin with, in virtually all of these societies religion was a matter of concern to state authorities. The nature of this concern varied considerably, ranging from cynical maneuvers by rulers seeking to capitalize on the religious commitments of their subjects, to genuine efforts to act in accordance with deeply held personal commitments. In either case, however, the concern led to efforts to harness the powers of religion in the service of the state.

Such efforts usually met with a favorable response on the part of religious leaders, or at least the leaders of the group enjoying political favor. From their standpoint, much could be gained from an alliance or merger of the powers of church and state. Such a relationship assured the group and its leaders a share in the economic surplus and the defense of their interests by the coercive powers of the state.

One of the natural consequences of such developments was the gradual weakening of family and local cults and the simultaneous strengthening of national faiths. These cults seldom disappeared, as evidenced by the survival of the cults of the saints in Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy and of cults of household and village godlings in Hinduism; but they were usually incorporated as subsidiary elements in the politically dominant national faith.<sup>78</sup>

One other feature of the religious situation which deserves special attention is the appearance of organized conflict between religious groups, sometimes on a major scale. This is virtually absent in simpler societies. The reasons it developed in agrarian societies are many and varied. In part these conflicts reflected a growing cultural pluralism and diversity which resulted in tensions between ethnic groups, between classes, between countryfolk and city people, and last but not least, between uninspired religious functionaries and their charismatic critics and rivals. Frequently several of these factors worked together to generate religious conflict.

Because of the intimate relations between church and state in agrarian societies, these conflicts usually involved the state and hence the use of coercive measures. In some instances they even led to wars of religion, as in the early history of Islam or in post-Reformation Europe. When

<sup>78</sup> Marriott, *op. cit.*

such conditions prevailed, a man's faith was likely to have profound consequences for his chances of enjoying the rewards of society, sometimes even life itself.

### The State, the Ruler, and Social Inequality

One fact impresses itself on almost any observer of agrarian societies, especially on one who views them in a broadly comparative perspective. This is the fact of *marked social inequality*. Without exception, one finds pronounced differences in power, privilege, and honor associated with mature agrarian economies. These differences surpass those found in even the most stratified horticultural societies of Africa and the New World, and far exceed those found in simple horticultural or hunting and gathering societies.

One cannot read very far in the histories of these societies without discovering also that the very unequal distribution of power, privilege, and honor in them arises largely from *the functioning of their political systems. To put it more plainly, in these societies the institutions of government are the primary source of social inequality.*

This is what we should expect, of course, in view of our general theory of stratification and our analysis of the nature of agrarian societies. Given the nature of man and society as defined earlier, we should logically anticipate an increase in social inequality as the economic surplus expands, as military technology advances to the point where the average man can no longer equip himself as well as certain others, and as the powers of the state increase. Furthermore, we should expect that the actions of men of power, who act in the name of the state, would be the primary source of this increase in social inequality.

To understand the nature of the distributive process in agrarian societies, it is essential to understand the nature of the state as viewed by the most influential members of these societies. For them, the state was not merely an organization which defined and enforced the rules in the struggle for power and privilege. It was itself one of the objects of the struggle. In fact, because of the great powers vested in it, it was *the supreme prize* for all who coveted power, privilege, and prestige. To win control of the state was to win control of the most powerful instrument of self-aggrandizement found in agrarian societies. By the skillful exercise of the powers of state, a man or group could gain control over much of the economic surplus, and with it at his disposal, could go on to achieve honor and prestige as well. As a consequence, the one who controlled the state would usually fight to preserve his control, while others would strive

either to curry his favor and thus share in his good fortune, or would seek to displace him.

For those accustomed to thinking of political institutions in functionalist terms, this view of agrarian states may seem strange and distorted. However, it is the only view which can make sense out of the most basic elements in the political histories of virtually all agrarian states.<sup>79</sup> In nearly every instance these histories are the record of an almost continuous series of intrigues and struggles for power both within and between states. Furthermore, these struggles were usually between individuals and groups concerned far more with their own partisan advantage than with either the principles of distributive justice or the common good, except in those cases where private advantage and the common good happened to coincide.<sup>80</sup> Although there have been some notable exceptions to this general pattern, they have been just that—exceptions.<sup>81</sup> Nor have they been strikingly frequent.

Probably the best evidence of this is found in the records of the thousands of military campaigns undertaken by the rulers of agrarian states. There is very little in the historical record to indicate that the interests of the common people were seriously considered by those responsible for these wars, or that the common people ever benefited greatly from them, even when their own nation was victorious. Most wars between agrarian states were undertaken by their rulers or ruling classes solely for personal gain or glory or to protect established interests from predatory neighbors.

Similarly, the internal struggles for power, both violent and nonviolent, which plagued most agrarian states, were seldom struggles over principles. Rather, they were struggles between opposing factions of the privileged class, each seeking its own special advantage, or, occasionally, a small segment of the common people seeking political advantage and preferment for themselves. Those involved seldom even claimed to be interested in anything other than personal or factional advantage.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Albert H. Lybyer, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1913), p. 147, for an excellent summary of the objectives of one agrarian state. See, also, Turner, pp. 306ff. for a more general treatment of the subject.

<sup>80</sup> For a good illustration of this from European history, see Painter's (*Monarchies*) description of the rise of the monarchies in England, France, and Germany.

<sup>81</sup> The exceptions referred to were the few agrarian political leaders who placed either distributive justice or the common good *consistently* or *usually* ahead of private advantage *in matters of real importance*. Of course, many men found they could afford to be generous in trivial matters, as long as they protected their interests in fundamental ones. Such men were not exceptions to the general pattern.

<sup>82</sup> Classic examples of this are found in the fratricidal struggles which regularly developed in the Mughal Empire on the death of the emperor, and in the many struggles in the Roman Empire which resulted in the assassination of nearly half the occupants of the imperial office.

When one studies the consequences of these struggles, the reason for their frequency is obvious. The capture of the machinery of government, either from without or from within, was a prize that brought fabulous wealth and immense power to the victor.

It is difficult to determine accurately the real extent of the wealth of the rulers of agrarian states of the past, but scattered reports provide clear indication of the immensity of the resources they controlled. In the last decade of the twelfth century and the first decade of the thirteenth, the English Kings Richard I and John had incomes which averaged £24,000 a year (excluding two war years).<sup>83</sup> This was thirty times the income of the wealthiest nobleman of the period, and, in fact, equalled three-fourths of the combined income of all 160 nobles.<sup>84</sup> The King's income also equalled the combined annual incomes of about 24,000 field hands, who at that time were usually paid a penny a day.<sup>85</sup> By the reign of Richard II, at the end of the fourteenth century, English kings averaged £135,000 a year (not counting the year 1380, when there were unusually heavy military expenses).<sup>86</sup> This was almost forty times the income of the richest member of the nobility, and *was equal to 85 per cent of the combined incomes of the nearly 2,200 members of the nobility and squirearchy* as reported in the tax on income in 1436.<sup>87</sup>

The incomes of these early English kings, as great as they were, were small in comparison with the incomes of rulers of greater states. Xerxes, the great Persian emperor of pre-Christian times, is reported to have had an annual income in gold which by current standards would be worth \$35 million; Suleiman the Magnificent of Turkey, \$421 million; Akbar the Great of India, \$120 million; and his successor, Aurangzeb, \$270 million.<sup>88</sup> Of course, much of the income of these men was consumed in maintaining the government, suggesting that these figures constitute what a modern businessman would call "gross income" rather than "net income." On the other hand, all of these figures are based on the current cash value of bullion, and therefore, as scholars point out, may be too low as measures of actual purchasing power. Actually, what is important is the relation between the figures involved and others in the same society, not those in

<sup>83</sup> Calculated from Sir James H. Ramsay, *A History of the Revenues of the Kings of England: 1066-1399* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), vol. I, pp. 227 and 261.

<sup>84</sup> Sidney Painter, *Studies in the History of the English Feudal Barony* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1943), pp. 170-171.

<sup>85</sup> Bennett, p. 121.

<sup>86</sup> Ramsay, vol. II, p. 430.

<sup>87</sup> H. L. Gray, "Incomes from Land in England in 1436," *English Historical Review*, 49 (1934), pp. 614 and 630.

<sup>88</sup> See Olmstead, p. 298 on Xerxes, and Lybyer, pp. 181 and 295, on Suleiman, Akbar, and Aurangzeb. I have adjusted the figures given by these writers of a generation ago to make allowance for recent inflation.



our society today. By this standard, the figures were in every case immense.

A few other examples will help to underline the enormity of the riches available to those in control of the machinery of state in agrarian societies. In sixteenth-century China, a eunuch, Liu Chin, managed to dominate a youthful and inexperienced emperor and turn the vast powers of the Chinese state to his own advantage for several years. In that short span of time he accumulated a fortune which, when recovered, included 240,000 bars of gold, 57,800 pieces of gold, 25,000,000 ounces of silver, three bushels of precious stones, 3,000 gold rings, and various other treasures.<sup>89</sup> The value of this fortune exceeded the total annual budget of the government. History also tells of an eleventh-century emperor of China whose *personal budget* was nearly twice as great as the sum provided for the salaries of all the officials living in the national capital.<sup>90</sup> In late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century Spain, the king was reputed to enjoy one-third of all the revenues of the land, though the wording of the original statement suggests that what he actually received was one-third of the economic surplus.<sup>91</sup> In eighteenth-century Prussia, the royal estates constituted "no less than one-third of the total arable area," a figure which was matched by the royal estates in neighboring Sweden.<sup>92</sup> Even these figures were surpassed in mid-nineteenth-century Russia, where the crown owned almost half the European territories.<sup>93</sup> Prior to the emancipation of the serfs, 27.4 million men and women were state peasants, whom the czars regarded as their property to dispose of as they wished. This explains how Catherine the Great and her son Paul were able to give away to various court favorites 1,400,000 serfs in the short period from 1762 to 1801 without seriously depleting the resources of the house of Romanov.<sup>94</sup> In our own day the premier of Thailand, the late Marshal Sarit, accumulated an estate valued at \$140,000,000 in only ten years, in an agrarian society with an annual per capita income of less than \$100.<sup>95</sup>

Of all the great agrarian states of the past, few provided a greater economic return to their masters than the Roman state under the An-

<sup>89</sup> Eberhard, p. 261.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210. Though the salaries paid by the Chinese government were typically small, this comparison is still impressive.

<sup>91</sup> Jean Hippolyte Mariéjol, *The Spain of Ferdinand and Isabella*, translated and edited by Benjamin Keen (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1961), p. 275.

<sup>92</sup> See A. Goodwin, "Prussia," in A. Goodwin (ed.), *The European Nobility in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Black, 1953), p. 86, and Heckscher, p. 126.

<sup>93</sup> Blum, pp. 476-477 and 492.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 356-357.

<sup>95</sup> *New York Times*, July 10, 1964, p. 2.

tonines of the second century. One historian summed up the economic situation of these men this way:

The emperor's wealth did not consist alone in the accumulated riches of his families or predecessors or in the immense *latifundia* he inherited here and there in Africa and Asia, or in the fact that he everywhere annexed the bulk of all partial or total confiscations decreed by judges. Over and above all this, nothing prevented his replenishing his private purse from the resources of the imperial Exchequer, into which poured the taxes levied for the maintenance of his soldiers, and none dared to suggest an audit of his accounts. He could dispose at will—with no need to render account to any man—of the revenue of Egypt, which was a personal possession of the Crown, and he could plunge open hands into the booty of war. . . . Almost as great a gulf separated him from the plutocrats of Rome as yawned between them and the "middle classes."<sup>96</sup>

To illustrate this last fact, he points out that whereas the wealthy plutocrats often had several thousand personal slaves, the emperor had a "slave family" of 20,000.

To fully understand how these vast accumulations of wealth came into existence, one must take into account the proprietary theory of the state which dominated the thinking of most men of power in virtually all agrarian societies. According to this theory, the state is a piece of property which its owner may use, within broad and somewhat ill-defined limits, for his personal advantage.<sup>97</sup> Also, like most other forms of property, it can usually be transmitted to one's heirs. This concept of the state has been well described by Max Weber in his classic analysis of traditional authority.<sup>98</sup>

Guided by the proprietary theory of the state, agrarian rulers saw nothing improper or immoral in the use of what we, not they, would call "public office" for private gain. It was simply a legitimate use of what they commonly regarded, and often called, their "patrimony." For example, as one historian said of the Ptolemies of Egypt, they showed the

<sup>96</sup> Jerome Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome: The People and the City at the Height of Empire*, translated by E. O. Lorimer (London: Routledge, 1941), p. 68. Quoted by permission.

<sup>97</sup> Robert Bellah argues that I have overstated the case for the proprietary theory of the state and that it was not nearly so widespread as I indicate. I believe our difference stems from reliance on different types of evidence. Clearly many scholars argued that rulers owed duties to their subjects and many rulers at least gave lip service to such principles. The evidence with which I am familiar indicates, however, that most of the practical decisions made by rulers were based on the proprietary theory, and this is why I speak of it "dominating the thinking of most men of power."

<sup>98</sup> See Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, translated by A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1947), pp. 341-348, together with Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 2d ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1925), vol. II, pp. 679-723.

first emperors of Rome "how a country might be run on the lines of a profitable estate."<sup>99</sup> The Ptolemies were by no means unique. Wherever monarchical governments prevailed in agrarian societies (and, as noted above, they were almost universal), the proprietary theory of the state held sway. Of medieval Europe we read:

The proprietary conception of rulership created an inextricable confusion of public and private affairs. Rights of government were a form of private ownership. "Crown lands" and "the king's estate" were synonymous. There was no differentiation between the king in his private and public capacities. A kingdom, like any estate endowed with elements of governmental authority, was the private concern of its owner. Since "state" and "estate" were identical, "the State" was indistinguishable from the prince and his hereditary personal "patrimony."<sup>100</sup>

William Stubbs, the English constitutional historian, once summarized the position of William the Conqueror thus: "The king of Domesday is the supreme landlord; all the land of the nation, the old folkland, has become the king's; and all private land is held mediately or immediately of him."<sup>101</sup> This same essential pattern is found over and over again in the most widely scattered times and places: in ancient Pharaonic Egypt, in the petty states of Kievan Russia and again after the Tatar yoke was lifted in the Russia of Ivan the Terrible and his successors, in the Ottoman Empire, and in India from the days of Alexander the Great to the Mughal Empire, to cite but a few instances.<sup>102</sup>

In some agrarian societies the records indicate that the king did not make formal claim to ownership of all the land. Some scholars have professed to see great significance in this and have sought to develop the thesis that these societies were basically different from those in which such claims were made. Without denying that such differences are important, it seems far more important to recognize that all agrarian rulers

<sup>99</sup> Mattingly, p. 137. See also Turner, vol. II, p. 620 or Michael Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 54, who says of both the Ptolemies and their contemporaries, the Seleucids of Syria, that "they identified their own fortune with that of the state, claiming for themselves the right of property over all its land and all its resources."

<sup>100</sup> See Hans Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience 1660-1815* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 506. Quoted by permission.

<sup>101</sup> William Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), vol. I, pp. 282-283. See also J. E. A. Jolliffe, *The Constitutional History of Medieval England* (London: Black, 1937), pp. 139ff.

<sup>102</sup> See, for example, Adolf Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, translated by H. M. Tirard (London: Macmillan, 1894), chap. 4; Blum, pp. 74 and 169, among others on Russia; Lybyer, pp. 28, 120, and 147 on Turkey, or 292 on Mughal India; Kosambi, pp. 200, 215, and 327 or Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire*, quoted by A. K. N. Karim, *Changing Society in India and Pakistan* (Dacca: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 37, on India.

enjoyed significant proprietary rights in virtually all of the land in their domains. Too often modern polemics and propaganda related to the subject of private property have obscured the fact that property consists basically of rights, not of things, particularly of rights to things which are in short supply.<sup>103</sup> If this is true, then agrarian rulers are owners, or part owners, not only of their royal estates and other lands which they lease, assign, or grant as fiefs, but also of all the lands from which they, by right, exact taxes or tribute—especially when they are free to use these revenues for private purposes. They are also, for the same reason, part owners of all the business enterprises they tax.

Our modern difficulty in grasping the true nature of such taxes stems from our tendency to think of proprietary rights as somehow indivisible. Either the peasant-farmer owns the land or the king owns it; they cannot both own it at the same time. This obtuse way of thinking plagued the British during the early years of their colonial administration in Asia and Africa. Well-intentioned officials were often responsible for gross miscarriages of justice when they attempted to systematize and codify native systems of land tenure in either-or terms.<sup>104</sup> This approach fails to do justice to the complexities of land tenure systems and other forms of property ownership both in modern industrial societies and in traditional agrarian. In both cases it is common to find several parties simultaneously enjoying rights to the same piece of property.

While agrarian rulers enjoyed proprietary rights in virtually all the land and businesses in their realm, differences existed in the magnitude of these rights. To begin with, a specific ruler typically enjoyed greater rights with respect to some pieces of property than with respect to others. For example, he usually enjoyed exclusive rights to the economic surplus of crown lands or royal estates, while sharing rights with others in the case of lands which they "owned."<sup>105</sup> In addition, certain rulers enjoyed more extensive rights over the economic surpluses of their realm than other rulers did. We shall shortly have occasion to examine these differences and the factors responsible for them, but the fact such differences

<sup>103</sup> See Robin Williams, *American Society* (New York: Knopf, 1951), p. 272, for a good statement of this.

<sup>104</sup> See, for example, W. H. Moreland, *The Agrarian System of Moslem India* (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, n.d.), chap. 6.

<sup>105</sup> A similar situation existed with respect to business enterprise. Sometimes rulers conducted lucrative businesses as royal monopolies, as did the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century czars in Russia, who at various times maintained monopolies in the sale of such things as liquor, sables, grain for export, raw silks, caviar, potash, rhubarb (much valued as a purgative), and walrus tusks (used for knife and whip handles). See Blum, p. 129. See also B. B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Classes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 33-34, for another example of this practice. Usually, however, they have been content to share the profits of business enterprise.

exist should never obscure the far more basic similarity stemming from the almost universal application of the proprietary theory of the state.

The exercise of proprietary rights, through the collection of taxes, tribute money, rents, and services, undoubtedly provided the chief sources of income for most agrarian rulers. However, these sources were often supplemented by others. First and foremost among these was *booty* obtained through foreign conquest. Not every agrarian ruler has been militaristic, and those who were, were not always successful. However, for those who triumphed in military ventures, the rewards were tremendous.

Sulla, the great dictator of republican Rome, provides a good illustration of the possibilities inherent in military campaigns. Though technically not a king or ruler, Sulla exercised virtually all the functions of one, including the appropriation of the fruits of victory. His greatest victories were in Greece and Asia Minor, where he defeated Mithridates, the King of Pontus. As one historian described it, when Sulla returned to Rome "his baggage trains were heavy with loot from the Greek temples, from the sale of captives and from wholesale robbery thinly disguised as an indemnity to the amount of 480,000,000 sesterces inflicted upon the unfortunate inhabitants of the Near East."<sup>106</sup> To appreciate the magnitude of this sum, we only need note that the pay of a common soldier in the Roman legions was but 480 sesterces a year, and a century earlier Cato the Elder had calculated that a field slave could be maintained in working condition for as little as 312 sesterces a year and a free laborer with family could subsist for as little as 1,000 per year.<sup>107</sup> However, Cato had the reputation of being a very careful man with a sesterce, and his calculations may therefore be a bit too low, though probably not by much. Several decades after Sulla's triumph, the wealthy orator and politician, Cicero, expressed the view that a man needed an income of 600,000 sesterces a year to live like a true gentleman, and two centuries later the less affluent poet and satirist, Juvenal, referred to 20,000 sesterces a year as the "vital minimum" necessary to live in comfort and respectability.<sup>108</sup> Even more meaningful than these, however, is a comparison with the total annual revenue of the Roman state itself in this same period. One scholar estimated that two decades after Sulla's victory, the total annual revenue of the Roman government totalled only 202,000,000 sesterces, or less than half of Sulla's booty.<sup>109</sup>

Of course, not all this was clear gain for Sulla, since he incurred many

<sup>106</sup> Cowell, p. 290.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 288, 258, and 104-106.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110 on Cicero, and Carcopino, p. 66 on Juvenal.

<sup>109</sup> Cowell, p. 386.

obligations in the course of acquiring this vast treasure. Just how great his wealth actually was will never be known, since he firmly refused to render any accounting of the funds, and no man dared challenge him. However, his contemporaries were certain that after his conquests he was, by far, the wealthiest man in all the Roman world. What Sulla did was only what hundreds of other agrarian rulers have done throughout the course of history, a few on an even grander scale.

After his return to Rome, Sulla adopted a second method which agrarian rulers often employed to increase their revenues, that is, confiscation, the domestic equivalent of foreign conquest. As in the case of conquest, confiscation involves the forcible appropriation of the property of others. It, too, could prove a lucrative business for powerful rulers, as Sulla clearly demonstrated. Turning on his enemies in Rome with the same vigor he had displayed against the forces of Mithridates, Sulla caused the death of no less than 2,300 members of the wealthy equestrian class and 90 members of the still wealthier senatorial class.<sup>110</sup> Their lands and goods all came under his control and he used them to pay off his obligations to the army that had supported him. If we assume that the average member of the equestrian order was worth 400,000 sesterces (the minimum requirement set by Augustus half a century later), confiscation must have proved even more profitable than foreign conquest.

This act of confiscation by Sulla was not exceptional in the history of agrarian societies. Many other Roman rulers employed it, including Mark Antony and Octavian during their triumvirate, Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, Domitian, Commodus, and Septimus Severus, to name but a few of those who, as one scholar put it, "excelled in this method."<sup>111</sup> Confiscation was also a popular instrument with the czars of Russia. Ivan the Terrible confiscated from the nobles and clergy of his realm estates which covered half the nation.<sup>112</sup> Two centuries later, Catherine the Great confiscated all of the vast church lands in Russia, as did Henry VIII of England and Gustavus Vasa in Sweden in the sixteenth century.<sup>113</sup> The first three of the Tokugawa shoguns who ruled Japan in the seventeenth century left a record which has not often been matched. During their reigns, *each* of these men confiscated from the feudal nobility roughly a third of the total arable land of the country.<sup>114</sup> Various English kings, among

<sup>110</sup> Boak, pp. 200-201.

<sup>111</sup> See, for example, Léon Homo, *Roman Political Institutions* (London: Routledge, 1929), p. 258; Cowell, p. 268; or Boak, pp. 244-246, 293, 299, 308, 328, 334, 347, etc.

<sup>112</sup> Blum, p. 145.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365; and Heckscher, p. 67.

<sup>114</sup> Takekoshi, vol. II, pp. 26, 227, and 305.

them William II and Henry I, employed the practice frequently, though not nearly so often nor on so grand a scale as the Tokugawa shoguns.<sup>115</sup>

The motives for confiscation were often political rather than economic. In the case of the shoguns, for example, their primary concern seems to have been to destroy the power of the older feudal nobility. This they accomplished by seizing the nobles' land and turning it over to their own kinsmen and followers. Of all the land they confiscated, the shoguns kept slightly less than 10 per cent as their own personal holdings. In general, it appears that *the larger the scale on which confiscations were conducted, the greater the likelihood that the political motive was dominant and the economic motive secondary.*

### The Governing Class

Kings and emperors never ruled alone. A small minority always shared the responsibilities of government with them. Though it is usually difficult to identify the precise boundaries of this governing class, it seems safe to say that it rarely contained more than 2 per cent of the population, and sometimes appreciably less. For example, recent research indicates that in nineteenth-century China, the gentry or degree holders, who formed the governing class, totaled about 1.3 per cent of the population in the first half of the century and about 1.9 per cent toward the end.<sup>116</sup> In mid-nineteenth-century Russia the nobility constituted 1.25 per cent of that nation's population.<sup>117</sup> In France, on the eve of the Revolution, the nobility of all ranks and grades constituted only 0.6 per cent, despite the recent influx of many wealthy mercantile families.<sup>118</sup> During the last days of the Roman Republic, the governing class is estimated to have included about 1 per cent of the capital's population, which suggests that the percentage would have been even smaller had the provinces been taken into account.<sup>119</sup> Finally, in seventeenth-century England, peers, baronets, knights, and esquires combined constituted roughly 1 per cent of the total population.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>115</sup> See, for example, Painter, *Barony*, pp. 192-193.

<sup>116</sup> See Chung-li Chang's excellent study, *The Chinese Gentry: Studies in Their Role in Nineteenth-Century Chinese Society* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1955), p. 164.

<sup>117</sup> Blum, p. 349.

<sup>118</sup> Louis Gottschalk, *The Era of the French Revolution* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1929), p. 47.

<sup>119</sup> Cowell, p. 283.

<sup>120</sup> Calculated from G. E. Aylmer, *The King's Servants: The Civil Service of Charles I* (London: Routledge, 1961), pp. 323 and 331.

The composition of the governing class varied considerably both within and between societies. It included the highest officers of state, such as the personal advisers of the ruler, as well as those whose political influence was limited to a single, small provincial community. It included civil officials as well as military. Many were members of this class solely by virtue of appointment by the present ruler while others were members by right of inheritance, having succeeded to lands or offices which constituted their family patrimony. Some of the former were even slaves, as in the case of the Janissaries of Ottoman Turkey, or recently emancipated freedmen, as in imperial Rome. Finally, the governing class included men of foreign birth, as well as native-born.

Though these differences were important in certain respects, which we shall consider shortly, the similarities were even more important. To begin with, membership in the governing class guaranteed to every individual certain unique opportunities for self-aggrandizement. To be a part of the governing class was to possess the right, acknowledged and supported by the supreme power in the land, to share in the economic surplus produced by the peasant masses and urban artisans. This was their reward for upholding and enforcing the authority of the existing regime in general and the ruler in particular.

The rewards for such services have taken varied forms, but they have always been substantial and, in the case of the ruler's chief ministers, have usually been immense. Frequently rulers granted members of the governing class vast landed estates or the incomes from them. This practice was especially common in those politically centralized states where the rulers had largely succeeded in preventing the establishment of hereditary land rights and where, therefore, estates normally reverted to the throne on the death of the estate holder. Grants of large estates were also common during periods when the ruler had acquired vast new territories through foreign conquest or wholesale confiscation at home. Of course, unless new lands were added through foreign conquest, these grants usually involved no net gain for the governing class as a whole, only a redistribution among its members. From the standpoint of the favored individual, however, it was pure gain.

Over the centuries there have been many instances of lavish grants of this type. One of the most familiar to English-speaking peoples involved William the Conqueror, who divided nearly the whole of England among his chief lieutenants.<sup>121</sup> Similar practices attended most important conquests.<sup>122</sup> In Japan, massive acts of confiscation by the first three Tokugawa

<sup>121</sup> See Painter, *Monarchies*, pp. 44-50.

<sup>122</sup> See, for example, Mariéjol, p. 262, on Spain following the Christian reconquest of the land from the Moors.



gawa shoguns were followed by large-scale grants to several hundred favored individuals and families.<sup>123</sup> In Ottoman Turkey and Mughal India, large grants were common because the rulers had been able to prevent the governing class from establishing hereditary rights to much of the land. Hence, with the death of every member of the governing class, lands reverted to the throne, creating a fresh supply of land for new grants.<sup>124</sup>

In agrarian societies, land grants nearly always carried with them definite political responsibilities. In seventeenth-century Japan, for example, the Tokugawa shogun prepared a formal schedule of military obligations which were incumbent on all holders of feudal estates. Those who had been granted estates of 1,000 koku were required to bring to the battlefield, on demand, twenty-three men, one spare spear, one bow (with arrows), and one gun (with bullets). Those with 1,200 koku were to bring twenty-seven men, three spare spears, one bow, and one gun, those with 1,300 koku, twenty-nine men, three spare spears, one bow, and one gun. This schedule extended to the level of holders of estates with 100,000 koku, who had to furnish 170 mounted men, 350 guns, 60 bows, 150 spare spears, and 20 banners.<sup>125</sup> A similar pattern of variable military obligations prevailed in medieval Europe, Ottoman Turkey, Mughal India, and elsewhere.<sup>126</sup> In addition, those given landed estates were usually expected to provide the basic elements of civil government, notably the maintenance of law and order and the collection of taxes, on their properties.<sup>127</sup> In short, land grants were essentially a form of appointment to governmental office.

Appointments to office did not always take this form. For various reasons they were often divorced from feudal-style land grants, especially in technologically advanced agrarian societies where money was more plentiful. Political appointment remained a lucrative reward, however, despite the fact that the salaries were usually small. Agrarian officials were always skillful in finding alternative methods of obtaining income from their posts.

<sup>123</sup> Takekoshi, vol. II, pp. 26, 227, 305.

<sup>124</sup> On Turkey, see Lybyer, chap. 2 and also pp. 82-89, 100-103, and 114-120, or Mercia Macdermott, *A History of Bulgaria* (London: G. Allen, 1962), pp. 26-27. On Mughal India, see Lybyer, pp. 285-286 and 297, or Moreland, pp. 9-12 and especially 92-100 and 205-206.

<sup>125</sup> Takekoshi, vol. II, pp. 20-21.

<sup>126</sup> See, for example, Bloch, pp. 220-221, or Pierre Caron, "The Army," in Arthur Tilley (ed.), *Medieval France* (London: Cambridge University Press), pp. 154ff. on Europe; Lybyer, pp. 100-103, or Macdermott, p. 27 on Turkey; or Lybyer, pp. 285-287, or Moreland, pp. 92-100 on India.

<sup>127</sup> See, for example, Blum, pp. 428ff. on Russia; Rosenberg, p. 30 on Prussia; Bennett, chap. 8 on England; Mariéjol, p. 273 on Spain; Edith M. Link, *The Emancipation of the Austrian Peasant, 1740-1798* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), pp. 14 and 18 on Austria; or Lybyer, p. 100 on Turkey.

A favorite source of such income in virtually every agrarian society was the sale of justice. There seem to have been few agrarian societies where his was not a common practice.<sup>128</sup> In imperial Rome it was so widespread at one point that Constantine the Great was driven to write, "Let the grasping hands of the officials forthwith refrain, let them refrain I say, for unless after this warning they do refrain, they will be cut off by the sword. Let not the *velum* of the judge be for sale, admission purchased, the *secretarium* infamous with rival bids, the very sight of the governor [who rendered judgment] at a price. . . . Let the depredations of him who is called *princeps of the officium* [i.e., bureau chief] be removed from the opening of a case. Let the *adjutor* of the same *princeps of the officium* [a subofficial] make no extortion from the litigants. Let the intolerable assaults of centurions and other officials demanding small sums and great be repulsed. Let the insatiable greed of those who give back the record of the case to the litigants be moderated."<sup>129</sup> Apparently almost every official involved in the judicial process was demanding a fee or gratuity. It is no wonder that the common people of China, faced with a similar situation, developed the saying, "To enter a court of justice is to enter a tiger's mouth."<sup>130</sup>

Not only was justice for sale, but so were other powers of government vested in the hands of officials. Governmental officials often refused to act unless the parties concerned were willing to make it personally advantageous to them to act. One can get some idea of the frequency of such practices from the experience of Cicero, who served for a time as proconsul in the large province of Cilicia. Unlike his predecessors, he refused bribes, a practice which left the natives, in Cicero's own words, "speechless with astonishment."<sup>131</sup> He wrote that it was all he could do to prevent the grateful inhabitants from erecting temples and statues in his honor. Because of his honesty, Cicero was able to accrue "only" 2,200,000 sesterces during his year as proconsul in Cilicia.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>128</sup> See, for example, Micah 3:7 and 7:3 on ancient Israel, or other references in Isaiah, Amos, and Psalms. On ancient Egypt, see Turner, p. 311. On the Roman Empire, see A. H. M. Jones, *Studies in Roman Government and Law* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960), pp. 170-171; on England, see Philip Lindsay and Reg Groves, *The Peasants' Revolt, 1381* (London: Hutchinson, n.d.), p. 21; on Spain, see Mariéjol, pp. 171ff.; on ancient Persia, Olmstead, p. 129; on India, W. H. Moreland, "The Revenue System of Mughal India," in *The Cambridge History of India*, vol. 4, p. 453; on China, see Robert K. Douglas, *Society in China* (London: Innes, 1894), chap. 2, or Morton Fried, *The Fabric of Chinese Society: A Study of the Social Life of a Chinese County Seat* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1953), pp. 65-66, to cite but a few of the countless references to this practice.

<sup>129</sup> Jones, *ibid.* Quoted by permission.

<sup>130</sup> Douglas, p. 104.

<sup>131</sup> Cowell, pp. 292-293.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

Earlier in his career, Cicero had seen how lucrative the business of office holding could be. In the year 70 B.C., he served as advocate for the cities of Sicily, which charged the former Roman propraetor, Verres, with numerous crimes committed while in office.<sup>133</sup> In the course of the trial it was revealed that in a three-year term of office Verres had looted the province of 40,000,000 sesterces, by every use and abuse of political power imaginable. One historian described his methods in this way:

By initiating false accusation, by rendering, or intimidating other judges to render, unjust decisions, he secured the confiscation of property, the value of which he diverted to his own pockets. He sold justice to the highest bidder. While saving himself expense by defrauding the collectors of port dues of the tax on his valuables shipped out of Sicily, he added to his profits by the sale of municipal offices and priesthoods. He entered into partnership with the *decumani* or collectors of the 10 per cent produce tax and ordered the cultivators to pay whatever the collector demanded and then, if dissatisfied, seek redress in his court, a redress which, needless to say, was never gained. He loaned public funds at usurious rates of interest and either did not pay in full or paid nothing for corn purchased from the Sicilian communities for the Roman government, while charging the state the market price. At the same time he insisted upon the cities commuting into money payments at rates far above current prices the grain allotted for the upkeep of the governor's establishment. At times the demands made upon cultivators exceeded the total of their annual crop, and in despair they fled from their holdings. To the money gained by such methods Verres added a costly treasure of works of art, which he collected from both individuals and cities by theft, seizure, and intimidation. Even the sacred ornaments of the temples were not spared.<sup>134</sup>

Those who opposed him are reported to have been subjected to imprisonment, torture, and execution. According to Cicero, Verres kept his jails so full and his executioner so busy that one of his lieutenants amassed a small fortune from the friends and relatives of prisoners in return for granting small favors, such as a painless execution.<sup>135</sup> Though his actions were technically a violation of the charter granted to Sicily by the Roman senate, the governing class of Rome was largely indifferent to his actions. As the same historian summarized the case, "The sad truth was that after all Verres was only more shameless and unscrupulous than the average provincial governor, and consequently the sympathies of the Senate were with him rather than with his victims, the provincials."<sup>136</sup>

Neither Cicero nor Verres appears to have been typical of the office holders in either the Roman government or other agrarian governments.

<sup>133</sup> For a good short summary of this trial, see Boak, pp. 210-212.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212. Quoted by permission.

<sup>135</sup> Jones, p. 154.

<sup>136</sup> Boak, p. 212.

Verres was greedier than most, Cicero more principled. The great majority apparently were not extortioners, as was Verres, but rather were content to limit themselves to what American politicians have sometimes called "honest graft." While not easy to define, basically the term refers to illegal gains by officials which they and others (or at least other officials) do not usually condemn on moral grounds. For example, Sir Francis Bacon apparently regarded himself as an "honest grafter": when accused of accepting bribes, he insisted that he only accepted gifts or gratuities for doing what he would have done in any case!<sup>137</sup>

Though extortion may have been infrequent, "honest graft" appears to have been extremely common. In describing the traditional pattern of government in the German principalities before the rise of Prussian absolutism, for example, one writer refers to "the matter-of-course confusion of public business with private enterprise."<sup>138</sup> On the basis of a thorough study of the income of Chinese officials in the nineteenth century, Chung-li Chang concluded that income from irregular sources, i.e., both "honest graft" and extortion, "totalled *about ninety times as much as the regular income*" derived from salary and expense money provided by the government.<sup>139</sup> This is, of course, only an estimate, and it applies only to a single society in a single century. It is a highly informed estimate, however, and evidence from other societies and other centuries strongly suggests that irregular sources of income were normally much greater than regular sources.<sup>140</sup>

Given the highly lucrative character of public office, such positions came to be regarded as a very profitable resource. From there it was but a simple step to the conception of public office as a commodity, available for a price. The sale of office was extremely widespread in agrarian societies. In fact, there seem to have been few which totally avoided the problem, though many did so for a part of their history. Offices were openly sold at various times in England, France, Prussia, Spain, Rome, the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire, China, Japan, and undoubtedly many others.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>137</sup> Aylmer, p. 179.

<sup>138</sup> Rosenberg, p. 54.

<sup>139</sup> Chung-li Chang, *The Income of the Chinese Gentry* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1962), p. 42. Italics added.

<sup>140</sup> Only a narrow specialist in Roman history could claim, as one has done, that the Romans had a peculiar talent for "illicit exactions."

<sup>141</sup> See, for example, Aylmer, pp. 225-239 or Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Reason Why* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953), especially pp. 25-29 on England; Elinor Barber, *The Bourgeoisie in 18th Century France* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1955), pp. 106-116, or R. Mousnier, *La Vénéralité des offices sous Henri IV et Louis XIII* (Rouen: Éditions Maugard, 1945) in France; Rosenberg, pp. 77-80 on Prussia; Roger B. Merriman, *The Rise of the Spanish Empire* (New York: Macmillan, 1934),

The sale of office has taken many forms, and has had varied significance.<sup>142</sup> In some cases, the ruler himself was the seller and this was simply another method of adding to his personal income. In other cases the seller was a royal favorite or leading minister of state, the head of the department or subdepartment involved, the current occupant of the office, the former occupant's heirs or executors, or the holder of a prior claim who was surrendering his rights. Frequently the spread of this practice indicated inefficient administration or a weakening of royal power, but not always. For example, Cecil Woodham-Smith developed a convincing case for the thesis that the spread of the purchase system in the British army after the Restoration was a deliberate device to keep top military offices out of the hands of ambitious adventurers who might again seek to overthrow the existing regime.<sup>143</sup>

Only a small minority of the governing class ever benefited directly from important offices in the *central* government. In nineteenth-century China, for example, only 1.6 per cent of the gentry held office in the central government at any given time.<sup>144</sup> One might possibly add to this figure the 1.1 per cent of the gentry who were secretarial assistants to the officials.<sup>145</sup> If allowance is made for the delays encountered in entering office and for the turnover of men in office, it seems probable that only 5 to 10 per cent of the gentry served as officials or secretarial assistants in the central government at any point in their career.<sup>146</sup> Such figures are similar to those reported for seventeenth-century England. According to the estimate of a scholar who has studied the problem intensively, 3 to 6 per cent of Englishmen of the rank of gentleman or above held office in the central government during one seventeen-year period.<sup>147</sup>

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vol. III, p. 193, and vol. IV, pp. 204, 217, 324, 438-439, and 463 on Spain; Homo, p. 358, or Jones, p. 156 on Rome; Jones, pp. 169-170, or Glanville Downey, *Constantinople: In the Age of Justinian* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), p. 66 on the Byzantine Empire; Lybyer, pp. 115-116 and 179 on Ottoman Turkey; Douglas, pp. 33-35, or Chang, *The Chinese Gentry*, pp. 5, 29-30, and 115 on China; or Takekoshi, vol. I, p. 141 and vol. II, pp. 454-456 on Japan.

<sup>142</sup> For a good discussion of this point, see Alymer, p. 227.

<sup>143</sup> Woodham-Smith, pp. 25-29.

<sup>144</sup> Chang, *Income*, p. 42.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>146</sup> Robert Marsh's study of Chinese officials during the Ch'ing, or Manchu, Dynasty indicates a median length of official careers as twenty-five years, but his sample of officials includes only those who achieved sufficient fame to be recorded in standard biographies. See *The Mandarins: The Circulation of Elites in China, 1600-1900* (New York: Free Press, 1961), p. 165. This view is supported by Hsiao-Tung Fei's statement that "officials did not . . . like to continue as officials for a long period. Their purpose in entering the government was to gain immunity [from taxes] and wealth in that order." In short, they aimed to become gentlemen landowners. See *China's Gentry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 32.

<sup>147</sup> Calculated from Alymer, p. 324.

Those not fortunate enough to hold office in the central government were usually involved, officially or unofficially, in the governing process at the local level. Chung-li Chang estimated that at any given time about two-thirds of the gentry in nineteenth-century China derived a portion of their income from such activities. Furthermore, the total income from this source equaled the income from offices in the central government. Because it was divided among so many more individuals, however, the average income from this source was much less. Whereas the average income from offices in the central government was more than 5,000 taels per year, the average from local offices was only a little more than 100 taels per year. Though the latter figure was quite modest in comparison with the former, it should be noted that the average annual income of those outside the governing class was only 20 to 25 taels per family.<sup>148</sup>

Another major source of income for the Chinese gentry was landownership. Chang estimates that approximately one-quarter of all the arable land of China was owned by the gentry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From this land they typically received 40 to 50 per cent of the proceeds as rent (from which they paid taxes and other expenses). The rate of return on investments in land was never terribly high, ranging from a figure of 10 per cent before taxes in the late eighteenth century to a mere 4 per cent in the late nineteenth. Because of the size of the landholdings and the number of persons involved, however, the total net income from landownership seems to have equaled the total income from offices in both the central and local governments, even in the late nineteenth century. If the total income from landownership had been divided equally among the 1,443,000 heads of gentry families in this period, it would have yielded an average income of 150 taels per year before taxes or 120 taels after taxes. Since some members of the gentry did not own landed estates, the average return for those who did was probably nearer 200 taels before taxes and 150 after.<sup>149</sup>

Members of the governing class often assumed special privileges denied other landowners. For example, in nineteenth-century China they evaded, or were exempted from, the payment of so many taxes that their rate was considerably less than that of commoners.<sup>150</sup> The economic pressures on the latter were so great that sometimes they were driven to registering their lands under the names of members of the gentry, a prac-

<sup>148</sup> Most of the information above is from Chang, *Income*, chap. 2. This is supplemented by information from pp. 42 and 327. This study is unique in the wealth of detailed, systematic documentation it provides on the distributive process in an agrarian society. This is the reason I have made such extensive use of it in this area.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, especially chap. 5.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 328-329. See also pp. 133-136.

tice which frequently resulted in the eventual loss of their land.<sup>151</sup> Another advantage enjoyed by the gentry was that the government would normally enforce their claims to unpaid rent, a practice not followed in the case of other landlords.<sup>152</sup> In short, landownership was usually much more profitable for members of the governing class than for others.

Last, but not least, certain of the Chinese gentry derived income from mercantile activities. It has sometimes been argued that members of the governing classes of agrarian societies viewed mercantile activities with contempt. On critical inspection, this turns out to be a half-truth. While it is true that petty mercantile activities were regarded as degrading, as one student of the French nobility put it, "big financial transactions are always respectable."<sup>153</sup> This was also the case in nineteenth-century China, where a small fraction of the governing class tended to monopolize the most lucrative forms of private enterprise. Favorite fields included the salt trade and foreign trade (both government-regulated monopolies), banking, and moneylending.<sup>154</sup> Less than 1 per cent of the gentry seem to have been engaged in mercantile activities, but they enjoyed such fabulous profits that the total income from this source appears to have nearly equaled the income from offices in the central government and was roughly half of the gross income from landownership. The average *net* income from this source seems to have been over 11,000 taels per year.<sup>155</sup>

Taking all the various sources of income together, Chang estimates that the Chinese portion of the governing class<sup>156</sup> of China received about 645,000,000 taels per year in the late nineteenth century, or 24 per cent of the gross national product. This averaged out to not quite 450 taels per family head, a figure which, as noted before, may be compared with an average income of 20 to 25 taels per family for the rest of the society. Within the governing class there were, of course, immense variations in income. Some, such as the chief officers of state, appear to have received 200,000 taels or more per year, while those on the lower margins of the governing class (such as members of declining families wholly dependent upon small farms) probably had little more than the national average.<sup>157</sup>

Owing to the paucity of systematic data, it is difficult to determine

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>153</sup> J. McManners, "France," in A. Goodwin (ed.), *The European Nobility in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Black, 1953), p. 37.

<sup>154</sup> The critical reader of Chang's study may wonder whether he has made sufficient allowance for moneylending, especially as an adjunct of normal landowning. See, for example, Morton Fried, pp. 125-126.

<sup>155</sup> Chang, *Income*, chap. 6.

<sup>156</sup> He excludes the Manchu segment from his analysis.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, Summary Remarks, supplement 2, and chap. 1.

just how typical, or atypical, these figures for nineteenth-century China are. Obviously variations existed within and between societies, both with respect to the proportion of the total national income taken by the governing class and the methods by which it was taken. One other source to which we can turn for comparable data is G. E. Aylmer's study of the civil service under Charles I of England, in the second quarter of the seventeenth century.<sup>158</sup> On the basis of various evidence from the period, Aylmer concludes that the governing class (men of the rank of esquire or above), who then constituted about 1 per cent of the English population, received about 24 per cent of the total national income in the form of receipts from their estates; in addition they seem to have received at least another 6 per cent of the national income from other sources.<sup>159</sup> This may be compared with Chang's estimate that the Chinese portion of that country's governing class, which comprised 1.9 per cent of the population, received 24 per cent of the national income.

This latter figure probably understates the governing class's share of the national income for the nineteenth century, and probably even more for the eighteenth. First, Chang's figures exclude the Manchu segment of the governing class, while including some rather marginal Chinese. If the former were included and the latter excluded, one would probably find that the top 1.5 per cent of the population received at least 30 per cent of the national income. Second, Chang himself reports that there was a substantial decline in the return on investments in land from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth century.<sup>160</sup> In the earlier period land had usually yielded a 10 per cent return while in the later period this had dropped to a mere 4 per cent. Thus, eighteenth-century figures would have been closer to the British pattern reported by Aylmer than nineteenth-century figures. On the basis of available data, it appears that the governing classes of agrarian societies probably received at least a quarter of the national income of most agrarian states, and that the governing class and ruler together usually received not less than half. In some instances their combined income may have approached two-thirds of the total. These conclusions are based not only on analyses of the income of the political elite, but even more on analyses of the taxes and other obligations of the common people in a large number of societies (see pp. 267-270).

<sup>158</sup> Aylmer, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 322-336.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 323 and 331. Evidence presented by Aylmer indicates that they received between £500,000 and £700,000 from offices in the central government, and it seems safe to assume that they had an equal income from other sources. I am also assuming that the average family in the governing class had five members at this time and that the total population of England was 4.5 million.

<sup>160</sup> Chang, *Income*, pp. 138-139.



As the foregoing has shown, landownership and public office clearly were the two chief sources of income for the governing class. One might suppose, therefore, that they were simply two alternative means to the same end. However, this was not the case. In general, landownership, when divorced from public office, was valued chiefly as a means to obtain prestige and economic security, while public office was used primarily for political and economic advancement.

If this distinction has not always been clear to modern scholars, it was to those who lived in agrarian societies. Their writings bear repeated testimony to the validity of this principle. For example, one seventeenth-century English gentleman put it this way:

It is impossible for a mere country gentleman ever to grow rich or raise his house. He must have some vocation with his inheritance, as to be a courtier, lawyer, merchant or some other vocation. If he hath no other vocation, let him get a ship and judiciously manage her, or buy some auditor's place, or be vice-admiral in his county. By only following the plough he may keep his word and be upright, but will never increase his fortune.<sup>161</sup>

Similar views have been expressed by Chinese writers.<sup>162</sup>

In this connection it seems appropriate to make explicit one point which has been implicit in much of the foregoing. In agrarian societies, wealth could often be converted into political power and vice versa, but, unlike modern capitalistic societies, it was easier to use political power to obtain wealth than the reverse. Robert Heilbroner, the economist and economic historian, formulated the relationship quite well when he stated that "*in pre-market societies [among which he includes agrarian societies], wealth tends to follow power; not until the market society will power tend to follow wealth.*"<sup>163</sup>

Before concluding this examination of the governing classes of agrarian societies, it is necessary to take note of one important variable characteristic. In some societies, as in most of early medieval Europe, this class was made up wholly or largely of the members of a feudal nobility whose power and privilege rested on their membership in a hereditary legal class. In other societies, such as the Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, and Chinese Empires at the peak of their powers, the governing class consisted to a great degree of bureaucratic officials whose power rested on their occu-

<sup>161</sup> Sir John Oglander, quoted by H. R. Trevor-Roper, *The Gentry 1540-1640*, in *The Economic History Review Supplements*, No. 1 (n.d.), p. 26. See also, pp. 11-12 and 25-34. Quoted by permission.

<sup>162</sup> See, for example, Chang, *Income*, p. 127.

<sup>163</sup> *The Making of Economic Society* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 27. See also, Trevor-Roper, p. 50, or Bloch, who writes of "that age when true wealth consisted in being the master" (p. 192).

pancy of offices which were not usually inheritable and who did not constitute a legally defined class. In still other societies, both elements were present and important. In effect, therefore, one may speak of a *bureaucracy-nobility continuum* which measures the relative importance of these two elements within the governing class.

The most important determinant of the location of societies on this continuum seems to have been their degree of technological advance, especially in the areas of transportation and communication. It seems no coincidence that hereditary nobilities were generally stronger in the earlier periods in most societies. Thus they were relatively strong in early Chou China, republican Rome, and early medieval Europe, while bureaucracies tended to be stronger at later stages in these same societies, as in late Ch'ing China, imperial Rome, and absolutist Europe. *Bureaucracy, being a centralized mode of government, presupposes a certain degree of efficiency in transportation and communication, and when a society lacked this, the more decentralized, feudal mode of government was likely to develop.*

A second relevant factor or set of factors were the various forces which were capable of creating political chaos and anarchy. *Anything which weakened the orderly processes of government, tended to favor the feudal elements at the expense of the bureaucratic.* The classic illustration of this is the decline and fall of Roman government in Western Europe under the combined impact of barbarian pressures from without and crises and divisions within.

A third factor which also seems to have been involved was the power of the ruler relative to the power of the governing class. *Where rulers were strong, they were usually able to strengthen the bureaucracy at the expense of the nobility, a course which they generally favored since the bureaucrats, with their limited tenure, seemed more amenable to royal control.* Thus the strength of the bureaucratic element in the governing class tended to be correlated with the position of the society on the autocracy-oligarchy continuum to be discussed below (see page 234).

The position of a society on the bureaucracy-nobility continuum undoubtedly had consequences for many aspects of its life. Obviously it was of great importance for the ruler and for those in or near the governing class, but it is not clear that it greatly affected the lives of the common people, the peasants, the artisans, the untouchables, and the expendables. This is an important problem, however, and deserves far more careful and systematic study than it has yet received.

### Rulers versus Governing Classes: Variable Patterns and Their Causes

Throughout the history of every agrarian society there has been an almost continuous struggle for power between the ruler and the governing class.<sup>164</sup> Though the outward form of these struggles has been highly variable, their basic character has always been the same: each party has constantly fought to maximize its own rights and prerogatives.

In such a struggle, the ruler's ultimate objective was to make the enjoyment of power and privilege by members of the governing class directly dependent upon the performance of services to the crown and the ruler's continuing favor. Practically, this meant that he sought to deny the existence of inherent or inalienable rights on the part of members of this class and attempted to establish a highly autocratic government.

Members of the governing class, for their part, constantly sought to infringe upon the rights of the ruler, with the ultimate objective of reducing him to the level of a *primus inter pares*, or first among equals. To this end, they constantly sought, as rewards for their service, *rights which would not terminate with the completion of their period of service, and rights which could not be abrogated simply at the pleasure or caprice of the ruler.*

Since land (including the peasants on it) and office were the chief economic resources in agrarian societies, the most important struggles between rulers and governing classes involved the issue of their control. One of the best available indicators of the outcomes of these contests is evidence pertaining to the relative distribution of rights to these two resources.

Even a cursory examination of agrarian societies reveals that the distribution of these rights was one of their more variable features. At one extreme, there were a few agrarian societies in which the rulers succeeded for a time in preventing the governing class from establishing anything more than minimal rights with respect to offices and land. This occurred in both Ottoman Turkey and Mughal India during the reigns of the more vigorous and intelligent rulers, such as Suleiman and Akbar.<sup>165</sup> Under such rulers, most of the land and offices were distributed by the ruler for

<sup>164</sup> For an excellent description of such struggles in medieval Europe, see Painter, *Monarchies*. For a more detailed picture, see Painter, *Barony*.

<sup>165</sup> See, for example, Lybyer on Ottoman Turkey or *The Cambridge History of India*, or Moreland on Mughal India.

lifetime tenure only, and were subject to instant confiscation should the services of the holder become unsatisfactory. In India, members of the governing class were often discouraged from living on the lands assigned them, and were instead encouraged to reside at the royal court, while managers chosen by the ruler supervised their estates and transmitted the revenues to them. Furthermore, the lands assigned them were frequently shifted about, with the result that personal attachments to estates and proprietary tendencies were held to a minimum. In short, their rights consisted of little more than the right to a salary which could be terminated at any time. On the death of an official, most of his property was subject to confiscation.<sup>166</sup>

One Dutch traveler of the early seventeenth century left a vivid picture of conditions then prevailing in India. He wrote:

Immediately on the death of a lord who has enjoyed the King's *jagir*, be he great or small, without any exception—sometimes even before the breath is out of the body—the King's officers are ready on the spot, and make an inventory of the entire estate, recording everything down to the value of a single piece, even to the dresses and jewels of the ladies, provided they have not concealed them. The King takes back the whole estate absolutely for himself, except in a case where the deceased has done good service in his lifetime, when the women and children are given enough to live on, but no more. . . . And so you may see a man whom you knew with his turban cocked on one side, and nearly as unapproachable as his master, now running about with a torn coat and a pinched face; for it is rarely that such men obtain similar employment from other masters, and they go about like pictures of death in life, as I have known many of them to do.<sup>167</sup>

In Turkey, conditions were even worse in one respect: a major portion of the governing class, including the highest officers of state, were legally slaves of the sultan, thus underlining their total dependence on his pleasure.<sup>168</sup>

Needless to say, most members of the governing class were not satisfied with such one-sided arrangements and efforts were made to alter them. One of the first rights sought was lifetime possession of one's estate or, better yet, lifetime tenure plus the right to transmit it to one's heir as a family patrimony. Even in such highly centralized and autocratic states as Ottoman Turkey and Mughal India, rulers found it difficult to resist the constant pressures from the governing class. Thus, in Turkey, for example,

<sup>166</sup> See Moreland, pp. 92-100, for a good summary of this system.

<sup>167</sup> F. Pelsaert, *Jahangir's India*, translated by W. H. Moreland and P. Geyl and quoted by Misra, p. 47. Quoted by permission.

<sup>168</sup> Lybyer, pp. 47-58 and 115-117.

the hereditary principle was gradually extended until eventually there developed a noble class not too different from that in Europe.<sup>169</sup>

At the opposite extreme from Ottoman Turkey and Mughal India was a handful of republican states without a monarchy. As noted previously, republican government usually developed only under marginal conditions and was seldom present in major agrarian states. Thus republican governments existed in certain early states in India and Russia, in remote mountainous areas such as Switzerland, and in agrarian states in transition to an industrial order, as in contemporary Latin America. The only instance in which this type of government flourished in a major agrarian state before the Industrial Revolution was in Rome, where it survived until the last century of the pre-Christian era.

Turning from these extremes, we find some of the best examples of domination by the governing class in medieval Europe, where the rights of rulers were usually minimal. As one historian put it, "The medieval state was a loose agglomeration of territories with rights of property and sovereignty everywhere shading into one another."<sup>170</sup> Though the landed estates of the governing class had often been obtained in exchange for a pledge of service to the royal house, such pledges frequently became unenforceable. Lands acquired by royal grants often became virtually sovereign territories, the patrimony of some noble family. The rights of the ruler, under such circumstances, were reduced to the occasional performance of military obligations and payment of taxes by his vassals. Even these were obtained only by rulers strong enough to enforce them.<sup>171</sup> Even the kingly office itself was, on occasion, made elective.

Though examples can be found of both extremes, i.e., rulers dominating the governing class and vice versa, the evidence suggests that the total distribution of cases resembles a somewhat flattened type of normal curve, with the cases in the intermediate range substantially outnumbering the more extreme ones. In other words, in the modal case the powers of the ruler and of the governing class would be fairly evenly balanced, with neither dominating the other. This pattern apparently prevailed during much of Chinese, Roman, and Japanese history, and most of the post-medieval period in European societies, to cite a few of the more familiar cases. It should be noted, however, that in all of these societies there were substantial shifts over the years, with the ruler tending to dominate at certain times, and the governing class at others. Nevertheless, even these

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>170</sup> Thompson, p. 699.

<sup>171</sup> There are many accounts of this period and the process by which royal rights were lost; for one of the better accounts see Bloch, especially chaps. 14 and 24. See also Painter, and Blum, chap. 2.

variations seldom reached the extremes of what might be called the "autocracy-oligarchy continuum."<sup>172</sup>

Ever since the days of the early Greek philosophers, political theorists have sought to understand why agrarian societies vary in this way. As a result of their efforts, it seems today that no single factor is capable of explaining either the variation itself, or the tendency toward clustering in the middle range.

One modern scholar, however, has held out against a pluralistic approach, and still insists upon what is essentially a one-factor explanation. Karl Wittfogel, author of the provocative volume, *Oriental Despotism*, seeks to revive the thesis propounded by Marx and Lenin, among others, that autocracy prevails in those areas where governments are obliged to promote large scale irrigation systems, while feudalism, a form of oligarchy, prevails where this is not necessary.<sup>173</sup> To make the theory fit certain inconsistent facts, Wittfogel introduces a second variable, namely diffusion, which he invokes to explain the presence of autocratic governments in countries such as Russia, Greece, Rome, and Spain, where large scale water works have been absent.<sup>174</sup> However, diffusion is of secondary importance, according to Wittfogel, as evidenced by the tendency of governments in these countries to regress toward the feudal pattern.

Unfortunately, as critics have pointed out, it takes more than the principle of diffusion to make this intriguing, but highly oversimplified, theory fit the facts.<sup>175</sup> The power of rulers in "hydraulic" Asia was not nearly so consistently autocratic, nor autocracy so absent from western Europe and Japan as Wittfogel argues.<sup>176</sup> For example, though Louis XIV of France probably never said, "L'état c'est moi," he could have said

<sup>172</sup> It is difficult to find, for the two ends of this continuum, labels which are not already overburdened with irrelevant or misleading connotations. The terms "autocracy" and "oligarchy" seem the best available for present purposes. As indicated, the continuum refers simply to variations in the relative power of the ruler and the governing class. The idea of such a continuum seems implicit in Weber's distinction between "sultanism" and "ständische Herrschaft," or "decentralized authority," as this has been translated into English (see *Theory*, pp. 347ff.). The distinction is also fairly similar to Wittfogel's distinction between "despotic" and "feudal" societies [see *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957)], though he tends to minimize the idea of a continuum while blending this distinction with the bureaucracy-nobility distinction noted earlier.

<sup>173</sup> See especially chaps. 1 and 2 of *Oriental Despotism*.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 6.

<sup>175</sup> See, for example, Wolfram Eberhard, *Conquerors and Rulers: Social Forces in Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 1952), chap. 2, or Eberhard's review of *Oriental Despotism*, in *American Sociological Review*, 23 (1958), pp. 446-448.

<sup>176</sup> See, for example, the rights of English kings to exact relief, i.e., payments for the privilege of inheriting a fief. These payments were often set so high as to remind one of the autocratic practices of the Turkish sultans and Mughal emperors. See, for example, Painter, *Monarchies*, pp. 50-57 and 67-69, or *Barony*, pp. 56-64.

it more truthfully than most of the later emperors of the Ming dynasty in China, who were notoriously weak rulers.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, the early rulers of Prussia, from Frederick William, the Great Elector, to Frederick the Great, had far better claim to the title of autocrat than did the many Ottoman emperors who were forcibly deposed by elements of the governing class.<sup>178</sup> In fact, no less than fifteen of the thirty-five sultans in the Ottoman dynasty were forcibly deposed, compared with only six of the thirty-three kings who reigned in France from the time of Hugh Capet to Louis XVI.<sup>179</sup>

One further difficulty in Wittfogel's work stems from the fact that the irrigation systems of Asia have not depended on the central government nearly so much as he and others in his tradition have supposed. Wolfram Eberhard, a noted student of Chinese society, has assembled considerable evidence to show that the construction and maintenance of these systems was much more dependent on the initiative and action of local authorities than Wittfogel recognizes.<sup>180</sup> Recent work by other scholars points in the same direction.<sup>181</sup> To summarize, then, *the evidence we now possess indicates that the need for large scale irrigation systems has probably been a factor stimulating the growth of autocracy, but not the dominant factor, and perhaps not even a major one.*

Two other factors which have influenced the location of nations and dynasties on the autocracy-oligarchy scale are the size of the political units involved and the quality of transportation and communication facilities. *The larger a state becomes, and the poorer its transportation and communication facilities, the greater the opportunities for members of the governing class to infringe on royal prerogatives.*

The influence of the size of states is seen quite clearly in the many accounts of the difficulties which rulers in the far-flung Chinese and In-

<sup>177</sup> For example, the emperor Ying Tsung was once captured by the Mongols and held for ransom. The leaders of the various court cliques were so indifferent to his fate that the Mongols were forced to lower their ransom substantially to get him off their hands. On his return, he was made a quasi prisoner while another man ruled in his stead, and he regained the throne on the death of the other only because the opposing court factions found it impossible to agree on any other candidate. See Eberhard, *History*, pp. 259-269 on the later years of the Ming dynasty, and pp. 259-260 on Ying Tsung.

<sup>178</sup> See Rosenberg on Prussia and A. D. Alderson, *The Structure of the Ottoman Dynasty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), especially chap. 10, on Turkey.

<sup>179</sup> These are my own computations. One might argue that the French kings survived because they were weak and therefore obliged to make concessions which placated their powerful opponents. As a general rule, however, forcible deposition was most likely to occur when rulers were weak. It has been the Bayezids, not the Suleimans, who have been deposed in most cases.

<sup>180</sup> Eberhard, *Rulers*, pp. 32-45.

<sup>181</sup> See, for example, Chang's work on the functions of the Chinese gentry in *The Chinese Gentry*, pp. 58-61 and in *Income*, pp. 48-50.

dian Empires had in maintaining effective control over the governors of the more remote provinces. Such officials often usurped many of the prerogatives of the emperor and, in some instances, even went on to challenge his right to the throne.<sup>182</sup>

The influence of transportation and communication facilities are evident in the histories of both China and Europe.<sup>183</sup> In each instance there is evidence of a long-term shift from oligarchical rule to autocratic rule (though not without significant short-term reversals). During the early Chou dynasty, for example, feudalism flourished in China, just as it did in the early medieval period in Europe. Later, with advances in methods of transportation and communication, there was a definite shift toward more autocratic forms of government in both areas.

The quality and efficiency of transportation were, to some degree at least, functions of environmental conditions. Rugged and mountainous terrain was a serious obstacle to the movement of armies, especially prior to industrialization. Hence, autocratic government was less likely to develop or flourish in such areas than in the broad flood plains, where the rapid movement of armies was normally possible. As noted previously, it seems more than coincidence that the few cases in which republican governments managed to survive the early stages of agrarianism were largely, or entirely, in mountainous areas.

The outcome of wars seems yet another factor influencing the outcome of struggles between rulers and their governing classes. *Rulers who were successful at war, and were able to annex foreign territories, could subordinate their governing classes much more effectively.* Their ability to distribute booty was a powerful instrument of control. The redistribution of land acquired by confiscation had the same effect, especially when those whose lands were confiscated had no strong ties of kinship or friendship with the new elite. Thus, confiscations would be most likely to strengthen autocratic rule at the time of the establishment of a new dynasty, when the old governing class was being wholly or partially replaced by a new one (as, for example, in the early Tokugawa period in Japan). Under other conditions, however, confiscations tended to unite the governing class against the ruler.

Losses in war, of course, had a deleterious effect on the ruler's relation to his governing class. As various writers have noted, the power of rulers depended in part on the myth of their invincibility. Once a ruler's

<sup>182</sup> See, for example, Franz Michael, *The Origin of Manchu Rule in China: Frontier and Bureaucracy as Interacting Forces in the Chinese Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1942). This volume provides an excellent account of the process by which the Manchu leaders raised themselves from feudal vassals to emperors of China.

<sup>183</sup> Andrzejewski, pp. 79-80.



vincibility was shown, his power was weakened and his rights were more likely to be challenged. In a very real sense he lost something of his charismatic character.

Still another factor that influenced the outcome of struggles for power between rulers and their governing classes was the role of the latter in military affairs. Where the governing class was a military elite, highly skilled in the arts of war, its powers were much greater than where it allowed other elements in the population, e.g., mercenaries, to assume military responsibilities. It is no coincidence that the great growth in royal powers in Europe occurred during the late Middle Ages, when the governing class tended to abandon its former warlike ways.<sup>184</sup> A very similar pattern developed in Rome when the governing class gave up its traditional military role.

This development seems to have been the result, at least in part, of still another factor, namely *the spread of a money economy*. Where money was scarce, rulers were obliged to build their armies from vassals who pledged their services. Such armies were generally difficult to control, especially when there was rebellion in the ranks, since vassals were often reluctant to support their lord against one of their fellows. Also, since the period of service required of such vassals was usually of limited duration, e.g., forty days per year, a rebellious vassal did not need to defend himself for long. With a stout castle, he could easily defend himself for the necessary period, or until the ruler's army dissolved and went home, and thus establish quasi sovereignty. With the growth of a money economy, kings began to hire mercenaries and found that such problems were much more easily solved.<sup>185</sup>

The relative power of rulers and governing classes also seems to have depended on the nature of inheritance among both parties. Where a system of primogeniture was followed by the governing class, it prevented the breakup of large estates, thus keeping intact this important basis of power.<sup>186</sup> Rules governing succession to the throne were also tremendously important, since they influenced the character of the rulers themselves. Where there was a principle of automatic succession, as in most European countries, children and other weak individuals could ascend the throne, thus providing the governing class with an excellent oppor-

<sup>184</sup> See, for example, Mariéjol, pp. 270-271.

<sup>185</sup> For a good discussion of the importance of money in this area, see Painter, *Monarchies*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>186</sup> The importance of primogeniture has been noted by many writers. See, for example, Wittfogel, pp. 79ff.; Alan Simpson, *The Wealth of the Gentry, 1540-1660* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961), pp. 107-108; Blum, pp. 82 and 378; Misra, pp. 44 and 50; or Mariéjol, pp. 276-277.

tunity to increase its powers.<sup>187</sup> On the other hand, where there was an open contest for the throne on the death of each monarch, as in the Mughal Empire, there were few weak rulers. To become ruler of the Mughal Empire a man was obliged to wade through a sea of blood, including that of his own brothers. This insured a long succession of strong rulers, who held to the barest minimum the rights of the governing class.<sup>188</sup> Throughout most of the Mughal period, most of the governing class held land only on assignment, which meant that they were entitled to the income from a given piece of land only so long as their services proved satisfactory to the emperor.<sup>189</sup>

Another factor influencing the location of states on the autocracy-oligarchy continuum was the amount of dissension within the governing class and the skill with which the ruler exploited this for his own advantage. One of the most important causes of division within that class was wealth. A few specific examples reveal the magnitude of these differences. In mid-nineteenth-century Russia, Count Sheremetev, the largest single landholder, owned nearly 300,000 serfs and almost 2,000,000 acres of land, while at the same time more than 40 per cent of the nobility owned twenty serfs or fewer.<sup>190</sup> Although the lesser nobility were far more numerous, they lacked power, as is indicated by the fact that they owned less than 3 per cent of all serfs owned by the nobility, while the top 1 per cent of this class owned 29 per cent. In what is now the Loire Department of France, in the latter half of the thirteenth century the incomes of the nobility ranged from as little as £5 per year to as much as £2,400.<sup>191</sup> Those in the former category maintained a style of life that was hardly distinguishable from that of the surrounding peasantry; as one historian has put it, "they were living from hand to mouth." In seventeenth-century England, the leading members of the governing class, the peers of the realm, are estimated to have had an average income from land forty times that of gentlemen and twelve times that of esquires, who together constituted the lower ranks of the governing class.<sup>192</sup> In fifteenth-century England, the fifty-one wealthiest barons had incomes which averaged nearly thirty times that of the lowest stratum of the governing class, the squirearchy.<sup>193</sup> Taking the individual extremes within this class, more than a hundred-fold difference is indicated (from £20 to £3,230).<sup>194</sup> A com-

<sup>187</sup> See, for example, Painter, *Monarchies*, pp. 127-129.

<sup>188</sup> See *The Cambridge History of India*, vol. 4.

<sup>189</sup> See Moreland, pp. 92-100.

<sup>190</sup> Blum, pp. 369-370.

<sup>191</sup> See Edouard Perroy's excellent study, "Social Mobility among the French Noblesse in the Later Middle Ages," *Past and Present*, 21 (1962), pp. 27-28.

<sup>192</sup> Aylmer, p. 331.

<sup>193</sup> Gray, p. 630.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 614 and 630.

parable range prevailed four centuries earlier, during the reign of William the Conqueror.<sup>195</sup> Chang's work on nineteenth-century China indicates that the upper gentry, who comprised about 14 per cent of the entire gentry class, had an average income ten to twelve times that of the other members of the class, and the variation between the extremes was more than a thousand-fold.<sup>196</sup>

In addition to these differences in wealth, members of the governing class felt the divisive effects of variations in rank, function, ethnicity, legal status, family prestige, relationship to the royal house, place of residence, e.g., court versus provinces, and military skills, to mention some of the most important. Such differences were of tremendous value to every would-be autocrat, since he, a single individual, could never maintain a position of superiority if the entire governing class were to unite against him. Thus, his only hope, when faced with opposition from members of this class, was to exploit these divisions among them, playing off the richer members against the not so rich, the old nobility against the newer elements, native elites against foreign, courtiers against provincials, and so forth. His power, therefore, was in part a function of the seriousness of these divisions and of his skill in exploiting them.<sup>197</sup>

Last, but by no means least, the outcome of every struggle between ruler and governing class was influenced by personality factors. A ruler who was weak, indecisive, stupid, or neglectful of affairs of state could quickly dissipate the accumulated gains of a succession of strong predecessors. On the other hand, a strong, ruthless, and intelligent ruler could often add substantially to the powers and privileges of the royal office. Personality variations counted for less in the case of the governing class, since these usually canceled out owing to the numbers of persons involved. The presence or absence of a dynamic, charismatic leader in this class, however, could well influence the outcome of its struggles with the ruler.

Sociologists are generally skeptical of the importance of personality variables in social processes. In the main this skepticism seems well founded, owing to the tendency for variations to cancel out each other when large populations are involved. Theoretically, however, it would seem that personality variables should grow in importance as the number

<sup>195</sup> Painter, *Barony*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>196</sup> The comparison between the upper and lower portions of the gentry class is calculated from data presented in *Income*, especially on p. 330. The comparison between the extremes is based on Chang's evidence that the top officials received an annual income of at least 180,000 taels, while many lesser gentry received well under 180 taels a year.

<sup>197</sup> For an example of the application of the policy of "divide and rule," see Mariéjol, pp. 264ff., on late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain. See, also, Rosenberg, pp. 152ff., on Prussia.

of cases in a population declines and also as the resources at the disposal of the population aggregate increase. If this is true, *personality variables should be most important in the case of a population of one with immense resources at his disposal, as in the case of rulers of nations.* At any one point in the history of a given nation, there is no "canceling out" of the personal idiosyncrasies of the ruler. Substantial variations are possible, and these become extremely important because of the immense resources under his control.<sup>198</sup>

To cite the significance of personality variables is not to minimize the influence of other variables, nor to deny that the personality traits of rulers are in part the product of social forces. However, heredity also plays a role in shaping personality and, from the standpoint of the social analyst, this unpredictable factor is capable, on occasion, of upsetting the most careful predictions based on an analysis of the social factors involved.<sup>199</sup>

Considering the many forces apparently influencing the outcome of struggles between rulers and their governing classes, it is not surprising that total victory for either side was rare and that cases falling in the middle range of the autocracy-oligarchy continuum were more numerous than those at the extremes. This was to be expected since it would be as unlikely for all these forces to favor one party at the expense of the other as it would be for ten tosses of a coin all to come up heads.

In this connection, one further point should be noted. When conditions were favorable for the maximization of royal power and a ruler pressed his advantage, he soon discovered the law of diminishing returns. After a certain point was reached (and it was reached long before the ruler could deprive the governing class of all its rights), the gains to the ruler were more than offset by the loss of incentive on the part of the governing class. To press the governing class further would harm himself as well as them.

There is good reason to believe that this point was reached at the height of royal power in the Mughal Empire. Here the emperors became so powerful that as much as seven-eighths of the land held by the governing class was theirs only on assignments of short and uncertain tenure. European visitors to the area often commented upon the inefficiency and low productivity of Indian agriculture. In seeking an explanation for these conditions, one reported the following as typical of the attitudes of the governing class:

<sup>198</sup> For a documentation of this principle on a lower level of organization, see Gitel P. Steed, "Notes on an Approach to a Study of Personality Formation in a Hindu Village in Gujarat," in Marriott, pp. 124-143.

<sup>199</sup> When sociologists shift from predictions to explanations of past events, they can usually find some personally satisfying explanation for everything without resort to personality variables, but this is not altogether convincing.

Why should the neglected state of this land create uneasiness in our minds? And why should we expend our money and time to render it fruitful? We may be deprived of it in a single moment, and our exertions would benefit neither ourselves nor our children. Let us draw from the soil all the money we can, though the peasant should starve or abscond, and we should leave it, when commanded to quit, a dreary wilderness.<sup>200</sup>

If this observer was correct, the emperors had so monopolized proprietary rights that the governing class developed what modern landlords call a tenant mentality.

Before concluding this examination of the struggles between rulers and governing classes, we should consider briefly their effect on the rest of society. This is a very important subject, but one on which it is difficult to obtain much more than individual opinions and impressions, and scattered bits and pieces of evidence. On occasion, rulers seem to have turned to the common people as a counterforce in their struggles with a well-entrenched and united nobility.<sup>201</sup> Sometimes the common people turned to the ruler for protection from predatory members of the governing class.<sup>202</sup> Alliances between the governing classes and the masses were much less common, probably because the governing class normally had sufficient resources to control the ruler if they could only maintain a united front. The ruler, by contrast, invariably needed allies.

Despite this occasional tendency of rulers to seek support from the common people, the latter seemed to gain little from it. What gains they made were always minor, and worse yet, short-lived. It is no great exaggeration to say that *the outcomes of all the countless struggles between rulers and their governing classes had almost no effect on the living conditions of the common people, except as these struggles sometimes led to violence and destroyed their very livelihood.*

A few writers argue that the growth of royal power was contrary to the interests of the masses, since it led to despotism and thereby destroyed freedom. Karl Wittfogel and the French political journalist, Bertrand de Jouvenal, are two of the most persuasive proponents of this point of view.<sup>203</sup> However, their criticism of autocracy as detrimental to the in-

<sup>200</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, quoted by Moreland, p. 205. Quoted by permission. See also Moreland, pp. 92-100.

<sup>201</sup> See, for example, Aristotle, *Politics*, translated by Benjamin Jowett (New York: Modern Library, 1943), p. 238 (1310b), and Plato, *The Republic*, translated by Benjamin Jowett (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), p. 323 (565), both of whom comment upon the tendency of certain rulers, i.e., tyrants, to ally themselves with the common people in opposition to the governing class. Similarly the Roman emperors often allied themselves with the urban masses in their struggle with the senatorial class.

<sup>202</sup> See, for example, Lindsay and Groves, pp. 19-22 and chaps. 9 and 10. As these cases illustrate, their efforts often came to naught.

<sup>203</sup> For de Jouvenal, see *On Power: Its Nature and the History of Its Growth*, translated by J. F. Huntington (New York: Viking, 1949).

terests of the common people appear more relevant to the masses in today's industrial societies than to those of bygone agrarian societies. These writers are concerned with the threat of modern totalitarianism, and they claim to find its roots in agrarian autocracy. They are probably correct in their assertion that the governing classes of agrarian states, who sought to establish rights and privileges which could not be taken away at the whim of the ruler, helped to lay the foundation for modern civil liberties. However, we need to keep an historical perspective and to remember that these efforts of governing classes were motivated almost wholly by self-interest, and in their own day benefitted few besides themselves.