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*Source: J. A. Hall, ed., *States in History*, 1986, ch. 2, pp. 48-77.

The Concept of Tribe

What is a tribe? To this question there are so many answers that some would have us abandon the concept of tribe altogether.¹ That would not be easy; I am not even convinced that it would be desirable. (Ought we similarly to abandon the concept of civilization on the ground that it breeds endless attempts at definition?) For though it goes without saying that there are questions for which the concept is unhelpful, it does not follow that it is meaningless; and what is more, the current dissatisfaction with it would seem to arise from problems susceptible of resolution.

Few would disagree that a tribe is a species of that genus of societies which create all or most of their social roles by ascribing social importance to biological characteristics, or in other words societies ordered with reference to kinship, sex and age.² No society which makes extensive use of non-biological principles of organization is a tribal one, for all that kinship, sex and age may still regulate numerous aspects of it; conversely, no definition of the tribe which omits reference to the biological principle of organization can be said to do its job;³ it is the organizational principle itself, not the various factors which underlie, accompany or result from it, which demarcates a tribal from a non-tribal society.⁴ This is obviously not to say that tribal societies are characterized by perfect correspondence between biological and social relationships: biological facts being innumerable, most have to be ignored for organizational purposes,⁵ while others may have to be denied outright,⁶ and a great many usually have to be invented.⁷ But the overlap between biological and social facts is nonetheless both considerable and significant; the reason why the discrepancy between the two is subject to manipulation is precisely that no discrepancy is supposed to occur.⁸

A tribe is thus a primitive society. It is primitive in that biologically based organization, however diversely elaborated, is given by nature in respect of its starting point (kinship, sex and age inevitably have *some* organizational importance in *all* human societies⁹); further, in that it costs nothing to set up or maintain (indeed its beauty lies in its capacity for fully automatic operation: ideally people step in and out of their social roles by the sheer fact of being born, growing up and dying¹⁰); and finally in that it works best in the absence of social differentiation

(the more similar people are in other respects, the more fully kinship, sex and age can differentiate their roles). Tribal societies are thus typically composed of identical and interchangeable units: everybody engages in the same type of food production, and all enjoy much the same level of material income and political influence, such differentiation as keeps arising in these respects being too unstable for the formation of permanent hierarchies; and all typically share the same language, culture and religion too. Since the building blocks of society are identical, the various combinations in which they engage are typically identical too in all or most respects except for size. Evidently there are variations on the tribal theme: *some* degree of socio-economic and political differentiation can be accommodated. But specialization, interdependence and inequality are features more characteristic of relations between tribes (or between tribes and non-tribesmen) than of those within them. In the absence of social differentiation, or significant degrees thereof, the biologically defined roles both can and must perform all the functions which complex societies assign to special agencies, above all the peace-keeping functions which complex societies assign to the state. Whatever else a tribe may be, it is a stateless society: the resolution of conflict rests on self-help, and one of the prime objectives of the tribal organization (including tribal religion) is to regulate and mitigate the disruptive effects of its use. There is of course such a thing as a tribal state. But a tribal state is a state superimposed on a society which is designed to cope without it and which may accordingly revert to statelessness at any time. It is only when the autonomous and self-sufficient nature of the building blocks has been undermined that we have a state *as opposed to* a tribe.¹¹

So much for the genus; it is when we turn to the delineation of the species that the disagreement sets in. Some authors simply equate the species with the genus and refer to all primitive societies as tribal,¹² or to all primitive societies above the level of the band as such.¹³ This usage is strictly speaking unfortunate, but what is the alternative? A label such as 'societies which organize themselves through ascription of social importance to biological facts' is not exactly convenient; 'kinship societies' is not entirely accurate, and in any case no adjective can be derived from either term. I shall thus defer to current usage and refer to all stateless societies as tribal in the wider generic sense of the word, provided that they are more than simple bands¹⁴ and that they make systematic use of kinship for their socio-political organization.¹⁵

A tribe in the specific sense of the word, however, is best defined as a descent group (occasionally several)¹⁶ which constitutes a political community. It may be subdivided into smaller descent groups and form part of larger ones, but it is distinguished from these by the fact that it is the most inclusive aggregate of persons who identify with each other as a group under common leadership.¹⁷ Descent articulates groups over and above the level required for production and the allocation of property rights;¹⁸ and it is this genealogical formalization of political unity which distinguishes a tribe in the specific sense of the word from 'tribes' which consist of little but intermarrying bands with a vague sense of unity on the one hand,¹⁹ and 'tribes' which rely on age organization rather than descent for political integration on the other.²⁰

Though well entrenched in the anthropological literature, this concept of the tribe does not, however, reign supreme. Some anthropologists reserve the word for groups (or aggregates) which have sufficient awareness and/or appearance of unity in linguistic, cultural, religious and other terms to have a name for themselves and/or to have been given one by outsiders, but which do *not* amount to political communities.²¹ According to them, a tribe is a 'socio-cultural-ethnic entity'²² within which political unity may be either limited to smaller descent groups (duly labelled subtribes)²³ or else completely context-bound (in which case the tribe is precisely a set of bands united by marriage, ritual and the like).²⁴ The Nuer, Dinka, Tallensi, Yoruba of Africa, the Kalinga of the Philippines, the Murngin of Australia and countless other peoples scattered over the face of the earth may all be adduced as examples of tribes in this sense of the word.²⁵ Practically all the problems associated with the concept of tribe arise from this use of the word; in this sense the concept ought indeed to be abandoned, and that for two quite different reasons.

First, if we identify the tribe as a cultural rather than a political unit, what are we doing classifying all stateless societies (with or without the band) as tribal in the generic sense of the word? The reason why the word has come to be used of both a specific group and a general level of political organization is evidently that it stands for a certain type of political organization. This may be thought to be a purely terminological inconsistency, but it drags endless conceptual confusion in its wake. A cultural unit exists for neutral observers to observe and measure regardless of whether its members are aware of its existence or not: tribesmen may speak related dialects, worship the same deity, and share the same customs without knowing this to be the case. But a political community has to exist in the minds of its members in order to have any external manifestation at all: tribesmen will not engage in joint political action without believing themselves to be related and/or in a state of alliance. It follows that the criteria required for the identification of culture-bearing units are quite different from those required for the delineation of political communities. Tribesmen may be of common origin, and even have memories thereof, without attributing any political significance to this fact;²⁶ conversely they may attribute much significance to a postulate of common descent entirely devoid of objective truth:²⁷ objective criteria do not on their own regulate behaviour in either case. Yet there are anthropologists who would have us identify tribes with reference to *both* objective criteria such as the distribution of certain morphemes (of which the tribesmen themselves may be quite unaware), *and* subjective ones such as belief in common descent (which may be quite untrue in the eyes of neutral observers), as if linguistic classification were a clue to political behaviour.²⁸ Zoologists, who classify animals in large descent groups known as tribes (phyla) for the study of animal evolution, do not mix up these tribes with the troops, herds and bands in which social animals live their social lives. Anthropologists ought similarly to have different terms for classificatory and ethnological use; and as it happens, the term 'tribe' in a human context has been pre-empted for the study of behaviour.

Second, if the tribe were to be identified as a socio-cultural-ethnic entity within which political communities are located, a people such as the Israelites

would have to be recast as a single tribe divided into twelve subtribes, while a people such as the Arabs (in the sense of bedouin) would have to be recast as a single tribe divided into countless subtribes, among the most famous of which one may mention the Rwala and the Al Murra.²⁹ To anyone acquainted with the Middle East this sounds absurd. Plainly, the socio-cultural-ethnic entity which some anthropologists would have us call a tribe simply is what others call a people;³⁰ and this venerable word is highly appropriate in that it is vague: a great deal of current agony over the concept of tribe arises from the fact that peoples *cannot* be precisely demarcated, that such unity as they have is frequently unity as seen through the eyes of outsiders, and that they owe this fluidity to the very absence of overall political structuring which a tribe, properly speaking, possesses. The mislabelling of peoples as tribes is so engrained in Africanist literature that Africanists are sometimes as reluctant to divide the Nuer and the Dinka into a plurality of tribes as are Arabianists to fuse the Arabs in a single one;³¹ and it is true that the Nuer, Dinka and other peoples of East Africa look like tribes in simple terms of size. But this goes to illustrate an interesting contrast between East Africa and Arabia. Both areas have long had a sizeable pastoralist, that is mobile, population and thus a potential for cultural unity, but the potential has only been realized in Arabia. There was an Arab people even before the Arab conquests;³² and had the Nuer, Dinka, Turkana, Karimojong, Samburu, Masai and others been camel pastoralists, they would no doubt have been tribes on a par with the Rwala and Al Murra too. But camel and cattle pastoralism are adaptations to different environments with different cultural results: East Africa has peoples at the level at which Arabia has tribes, and its political communities are correspondingly smaller and/or less tightly integrated. It would be helpful if Africanists (and others) could be persuaded to change their terminology in recognition of this fact.³³

Generally speaking, it is a pity that Middle Eastern and Central Asian tribes figure so rarely in discussions of the nature of tribalism, for they represent an important variety thereof. It is undoubtedly true that most stateless societies lack an overall group identifiable as the political community (*viz.* the tribe), because political functions are not necessarily clustered at a single level, and because even when they are, so much of social life is conducted outside the grouping in question that society must be defined as more inclusive than that grouping.³⁴ But this merely goes to show that most stateless societies are less tightly organized in political terms than the pastoralists of the Middle East and Central Asia.³⁵ Picking out the tribe among the bedouin, for example, is problematic only when basic information is missing (as for example in the context of pre-Islamic Arabia): the tribe is that descent group within which control of pasture land is vested,³⁶ within which particular rules regarding blood-money and other aspects of behaviour apply,³⁷ which is endowed with a chief,³⁸ and within which most of social life is conducted.³⁹ It may well be that the tribe in the specific sense of the word is an overwhelmingly pastoral phenomenon, in the sense that the definition offered here will often be found inadequate when applied to settled tribes.⁴⁰ But the question how far there are systematic differences between nomadic and settled forms of tribal organization remains to be explored.⁴¹

The Tribe and the Origin of the State

What then is the evolutionary relationship between the tribe and the state? There is a widespread belief to the effect that the tribe constitutes an indispensable stage in the evolution of mankind from primitivity to statehood. Evidently, if we take the tribe to mean primitive society in general, including bands, we are left with a tautology; and if conversely we equate it with the tribe in the specific sense of the word, we are left with a most implausible claim.⁴² But did the state evolve from the tribe generically speaking, or in other words from the systematic use of kinship (and sex and age) for purposes of social organization? The belief that the tribe in this sense of the word constitutes a halfway house to civilization was perhaps first formulated by Morgan.⁴³ More recently, it has been taken up by Sahlins and Service, both of whom have argued that the tribal level should be seen as the second stage in the political evolution of mankind: bands in their view have evolved into tribes which have evolved via tribal chiefdoms into states.⁴⁴ And though Service has since modified his position,⁴⁵ a fair number of historians (including Soviet ones) seem to operate with the same evolutionary scheme.⁴⁶ It undeniably has an almost instinctive appeal. As formulated by Sahlins and Service, its most sophisticated exponents, it rests on two assumptions: first, material developments generate more complex forms of socio-political organization (whatever its palaeolithic antecedents, the tribe gained dominance on the transition to the neolithic when food production made for more stable and unique resources, denser populations, and thus more scope for conflict⁴⁷); and secondly, the essential difference between band, tribe and state lies in their level of complexity — a tribe may start as a loose cluster of bands, but the more tribal, that is complex and integrated, it becomes, the more closely it will approximate a chiefdom, which in its turn only requires further complexity to develop into a primitive state.⁴⁸ If both assumptions were correct, history should confirm Sahlins and Service's thesis, but in fact it does not. The historical record is against it for the obvious reason that the second assumption is wrong.

Let us start with the historical record: can it be claimed that the first states in history developed out of tribal chiefdoms? In the absence of written evidence it is hard to say much about Olmec America,⁴⁹ and the case of Egypt is complicated by the fact that state formation here took place against a background of Mesopotamian influence (though in tune with the anti-diffusionist mood of the time, the formative role of this influence is nowadays denied⁵⁰). But the thesis ought at the very least to be applicable to Sumeria, where states emerged before anywhere else in the world; and it is precisely here that it fails.

It fails, that is, if we choose to forget our scholarly qualms; it might well be argued that so little evidence is extant that no verdict is possible. But if we venture to argue with reference to such evidence as survives, it is clear that we can only endow the Sumerians with a tribal past by making it axiomatic that they *must* have had such a past. Obviously, if the so-called conical clan is a *sine qua non* for the growth of states, then the growth of the state in Sumeria *ipso facto* proves that the conical clan had been prevalent there; and if so, it makes good sense to attribute a maximal sense of 'lineage' or 'clan' to the Sumerian word for 'family', to see

'incomplete' kin groups as residues of larger and more inclusive kin organizations, and to suppose that 'kin affiliation played an important role even in many cases where it is not attested.'⁵¹ But if we use the evidence to test the axiom rather than the axiom to make sense of the evidence, then the conical clan disappears together with practically all other evidence for inclusive kinship structures.⁵² What remains is evidence for extended families with joint rights in family property,⁵³ but not for descent groups of any great size or depth⁵⁴ or for kinship groups of any kind endowed with political functions.⁵⁵ There is in fact no sense in Sumerian history that kinship structures of one kind or another had to be broken in order for a specialized political agency to emerge, or that modified versions thereof retained political influence thereafter. No descent groups comparable with the *gentes* of the Romans served to divide the populations of Uruk, Nippur or Kish into citizens and metics;⁵⁶ no vestigial age organization comparable with that of the Spartans can be shown to have survived. There was no use of genealogy to express political relationships,⁵⁷ no ranking on the basis of descent, no pride in pure, high or freeborn birth, no stress on honour or the sacred duty to assist one's kinsfolk.⁵⁸ There is no trace of a concept of homicide as a loss to a group,⁵⁹ nor is there any literature, be it mythological, epical or other, on the theme of feuds and private vengeance.⁶⁰ In short the Sumerians come across as singularly *lacking* in a tribal past.

Even if we postulate that the Sumerians originated as tribesmen, the evidence is incompatible with the view that tribal chiefs played a crucial role in their transition to statehood. Whichever type of chief we propose as the starting point, chiefdoms develop into states through the gradual accumulation of power in the hands of the chief and his entourage on the one hand, and gradual differentiation of society in socio-economic and political terms on the other. But in Sumeria it was the gods who accumulated power, and it was their demands, not those of a chief, priest or other human being, which caused society to be reorganized and differentiated. Sumerian mythology repeatedly states that the gods created man in order to escape the hard work of looking after themselves;⁶¹ and because all human beings were equal in their bondage to the gods, human society was remarkably egalitarian. Political decision-making rested in an assembly composed of all male adult members of the city-state.⁶² The gods at any rate reached all decisions of a public nature in such assemblies, and since the myths describe a mode of decision-making well attested for other peoples at a comparable stage of political evolution, it makes sense to assume with Jacobsen that the divine assemblies mirror those of the Sumerians themselves in Pre-Dynastic times.⁶³ By Early Dynastic times the assembly had come to be subdivided into one of elders and another of townsmen, while at the same time its role had been reduced to that of ratifying or vetoing royal decisions;⁶⁴ and though it survived as a judicial and municipal institution, it would appear soon to have lost all control of royal politics.⁶⁵ In other words, it was *after* the creation of city-states that power began to accumulate in the hands of kings and retainers to the exclusion of the masses: chiefs were the outcome of the transition to statehood, not its initiators.

Economically, too, society was egalitarian. Just as it was the gods rather than their slaves who had power, so it was the gods rather than their slaves who owned

land. Each city was the personal estate of the god to which it had been assigned on the creation of man,⁶⁶ or in other words all city land was owned by the temple. This is admittedly an unfashionable thesis these days, but though it cannot be defended in terms of the evidence originally adduced in its favour, it can scarcely be said to have been refuted.⁶⁷ It is generally agreed that the temple had become a large-scale enterprise already before 3,000 BC and that by the third millennium BC its functions included the co-ordination of major projects such as irrigation work, the organization of corvées in general, the production of metal and textile goods, the conduct of long-distance trade, the exchange of commodities within the city itself, as well as the maintenance of widows, orphans, cripples and others unable to look after themselves.⁶⁸ It is also agreed that it was a substantial, but not the only landowner at the end of the Early Dynastic period, about 2,400 BC. The question is thus what starting point we postulate: had temple holdings expanded in the period from the emergence of the temple to the end of the Pre-Dynastic Period, or had they contracted? Most scholars now hold them to have expanded: temple and state supposedly developed in tandem at the cost of tribes, clans, lineages and/or self-governing peasant communities to the point that they were in joint political and economic control of the city by about 2,400 BC; temple and state, in short, were different manifestations of the same oppressive powers which appropriate land from peasants or collectivize it at their expense.⁶⁹ But temple and state did not develop in tandem. Theoretically, the city belonged to the god, not to the king, and the temple became a large-scale enterprise at a time when kings barely existed. It is legitimate to assume that divine ownership was originally taken as literally as was the divine need for food, drink, clothing and housing; and the temple can scarcely have acquired its predominant administrative position without owning so much of the land that we may as well postulate that they began by owning all of it. In short, non-temple land arguably only appeared on the development of royal power, perhaps coupled with expansion into new areas.⁷⁰ Now Soviet scholars see very well that just as kings were eating away at an egalitarian political structure, so they were eating away at an egalitarian economic organization, but what they do not see is that the *temple* was the institution on which this egalitarianism rested.⁷¹ Yet it was precisely because all were slaves of the god that all were equal;⁷² and egalitarianism survived as long as the *en* or *ensi* remained a mere steward on behalf of the divine overlord while at the same time the *lugal* remained a temporary warleader.⁷³ But inevitably the temple organization, once set up, created that differential access to strategic resources which spelled the end of socio-economic equality while at the same time the escalating warfare between the cities created a need for more permanent and powerful kings. In the last resort the outcome of the venture was indeed a division of power and privilege between temple and state to the exclusion of the rest of the community after the fashion familiar from other pre-industrial societies, but what we are concerned with here is how it began. Clearly, it must have begun with slaves of the gods pooling their resources in order to perform the onerous task of providing their masters with the massive housing and regular quantities of food, drink and clothing required by the latter. The pooling may have created a society characterized by division of labour, but it was the temple which enabled it to diversify to the extraordinary degree

characteristic of it already in myths.⁷⁴ In other words, socio-economic differentiation was achieved through the creation of a cooperative: of oppression there was plenty, but the oppression was divine. It is for this reason that even privileged persons such as merchants, scribes, stewards and priests were liable to *corvée* in historical times;⁷⁵ indeed, even the much later Assyrian king went through the formal act of carrying a basket of soil on his head.⁷⁶

The first civilization in history was thus the product of religion, or in other words of imagination endowed with supreme authority. One suspects the same is true of the first civilization in America, for here too it begins with the erection of gigantic buildings totally devoid of use to man or beast from a purely material point of view.⁷⁷ Why the Sumerians should have conceived of their gods as they did may well be beyond explanation, but two factors are likely to be significant. The first is what Mann calls the caging of the agriculturalists. "Fixed settlement traps people into living with each other, cooperating, and devising more complex forms of social organization",⁷⁸ he observes, explaining that irrigation trapped people, partly because the amount of irrigated land was limited and partly because its cultivation required a substantial investment in labour: by taking up irrigation agriculture the Sumerians unwittingly locked themselves into a territorial and social cage.⁷⁹ (A similar mechanism undoubtedly operated in America.⁸⁰) The second factor is a development among fishermen (possibly also some form of caging) to which little attention has been paid so far. Temple-building in Mesopotamia starts at Eridu, a city built on virgin soil;⁸¹ and whether or not the inhabitants of Eridu were Sumerians, this is where Sumerian history has its roots, as the Sumerians themselves may be said to have conceded by identifying Eridu as one of the five anti-diluvian cities, the first city in the world to which kingship descended from heaven, and the city from which Inanna made off with all the appurtenances of civilization for the benefit of Uruk.⁸² Now at Eridu, where one temple after another was built on the same site, the remains of the food offered to the local god take the form of massive quantities of fishbones; Adapa, the Sumerian Adam who forfeited the chance of gaining immortality for humanity, was a fisherman doing 'the prescribed fishing for Eridu'; no less than 100 fishermen regularly delivered fish to a temple of secondary importance at Lagash; and a late chronicle explains the rise and fall of dynasties in terms of the punctuality or otherwise of kings with respect to the supply of fish to the supreme god.⁸³ Clearly there is a clue of some importance here to which practically no attention has been paid so far. Now the interest of fishermen lies in the fact that they are *hunters*, or in other words they are exactly the kind of people whom Sahlins and Service condemn to insignificance on the rise of the neolithic; but they are hunters of a peculiar kind in that they flourish as well under industrial conditions as they did in the palaeolithic: whereas the systematic breeding of plants began about 10,000 BC, the systematic breeding of fish has only begun to acquire importance today, after a hiatus of some 12,000 years. Fishermen are thus exceedingly archaic people capable of adapting to modern conditions, and one suspects that their role in the creation of Sumerian civilization is connected with this fact.

So much for the historical record. We may now turn to the reasons why Sahlins and Service's theory is wrong.⁸⁴ As mentioned already, it rests on a

mistaken assumption: tribe and state are not similar types of organization distinguished by their level of complexity, but on the contrary *alternative* forms of organization evolved in response to similar problems. The tribe does indeed represent a natural progression from the band. It differs from the band only in that it is larger, tighter and more complex, as Sahlins and Service say, or in other words in that more systematic use is being made of the embryonic differentiation which is given by nature. But spinning highly elaborate social systems out of elementary differences in respect of sex, age and kinship does not amount to a shot at state structures for the simple reason that state structures do not rest on these differences at all. On the contrary, in opting for more systematic use of biologically based differences tribal societies acquire a vested interest in minimizing social differentiation. They may not of course be able to prevent material developments and/or external stimuli from generating such differentiation; but on the one hand they have in-built mechanisms for counteracting such developments,⁸⁵ and on the other hand they will respond to such differentiation as cannot be avoided by further elaboration of the biologically based roles.⁸⁶ Naturally differentiation may proceed so far that the tribal organization simply bursts, but what matters is precisely that it has to *burst*: the tribal organization does not itself have any dynamic potential.⁸⁷ Bands do not have to be destroyed in order for tribes to emerge, but tribes do have to be destroyed in order to make way for states. Behind Sahlins and Service's theory lie the Polynesian chiefdoms of Hawaii and Tahiti, and here socio-economic and political differentiation did indeed proceed so far that states could *almost* be said to have existed.⁸⁸ Sahlins and Service clearly assume that proper states would sooner or later have emerged of their own accord if the Polynesians had been left alone, and maybe they would have; but in historical fact it took exposure to the Europeans to wrench these chiefdoms off their tribal moorings, as Sahlins himself concedes.⁸⁹ Whether states would or would not have developed on their own, however, the dynamic potential of the Polynesian chiefdoms did not lie in the local version of tribal organization (the famous conical clan), but on the contrary in religion. Had the Polynesian gods been more demanding, temple-building might well have generated new social and political roles here as it did in Sumeria;⁹⁰ but for one reason or another they were too complacent. One suspects that they were too complacent precisely *because* a perfectly satisfactory tribal system existed; differently put, one suspects that state structures emerged among the Sumerians, all the more easily in that no tribal organization had been developed.

Sahlins and Service's theory raises a fundamental question about the manner in which human society has evolved. It should be clear from what has been said that the tribe (still generically speaking) is a far more obvious solution to the problem of social organization above the familial level than is the state. Human beings easily learn to regulate their behaviour with reference to features which are inherent in themselves, plainly visible or partly so⁹¹ and seemingly given by nature, as may be inferred not only from the constant use which has been made of such features throughout human history, but also from the difficulty with which they are abandoned when they cease to be required: even under industrial conditions people take that plainly visible assembly of features which used to be

subsumed under the label of 'race' as a social signal unless they have been specifically trained to ignore it. By contrast the state is an organization based on concepts which are external to people, devoid of visibility and highly unnatural except insofar as sex differences, heredity and the like are allowed to overlay them: a great deal of cultural brainwashing is required in order for *polis*, class or bureaucracy to appear as if given by nature. The discovery that people could be organized with reference to external concepts (viz. the gods and their impersonal successors) was a breakthrough of the same magnitude and the same fatefulness as the neolithic revolution which preceded it and the industrial revolution which was to follow; and the fundamental question which it raises is whether or in what sense one breakthrough can be said necessarily to have led to the next. The fact that plants were domesticated in both Asia and America, at different times but nonetheless at times for which the possibility of diffusion is ruled out, and that in both cases the sequel was the emergence of state structures, evidently suggests a certain inevitability about human history, and this inevitability is built into most evolutionary theories.⁹² But it is surely a no less striking fact that the vast majority of hunters did not invent agriculture, that the vast majority of those who borrowed agriculture did not proceed to invent the state, and that the vast majority of those who adopted state structures did not develop in a direction from which industrialization was likely to ensue. In all three cases the *mainstream* development was one towards stability at the new level, and this is as might be expected: after all, the whole of human history may be summarized as a futile attempt to devise a perfect adaptation to whatever material and cultural environment has existed at any given time. In other words, the breakthroughs were made by people who had somehow *not* participated in the mainstream development:⁹³ in the case of the Sumerians, by people who had apparently not developed the tribal structures which the neolithic had made so important. Every breakthrough was a precondition for the next, but the next was not its natural outcome, or it was its natural outcome only in the sense that every possibility will be realized given infinite time. The parallel developments in Asia and America show that human beings were statistically more likely to invent agriculture and states than are monkeys of inadvertently typing out Shakespearean plays; but there is nonetheless a freakish quality to all the great advances, as has been noted before.⁹⁴ It is because the great advances do *not* represent natural outcomes of earlier developments that band, tribe, chiefdom, state and the numerous variations thereof cannot be ordered along a single evolutionary line, or in other words that mainstream solutions have time and again turned out to be evolutionary dead ends. By the same token, it may be noted, there is something woodenheaded about the current distrust of diffusionism; for if breakthroughs are freakish, they are *ipso facto* unlikely to have been made independently time and again.⁹⁵ Would Egypt have developed into a state (as opposed, say, to a tribal chiefdom) if it had not been exposed to Mesopotamian influence?⁹⁶ Have states actually been *invented* in any part of the world apart from Mesopotamia and Meso-America? It is hard to believe that pristine state formation in the true sense of the word has taken place more than twice.⁹⁷

The reason why Sahlins and Service's theory has such instinctive appeal is that *secondary* state formation has more often than not involved a transition from tribe

to state: we are all familiar with the reality behind the model. Given that the tribe represents the mainstream solution, whereas the state represents an isolated one which turned out to be infinitely more powerful, it is not surprising that the majority of mankind has been forced sooner or later to make a transition from the one to the other; and this process has indeed in many cases (though by no means always) involved the emergence of chiefs and kinglets, who have hammered away at the autarkic societies underneath them in an attempt to destroy the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the building blocks, and who have been forced to shed blood on a lavish scale by the very fact that tribes and states are diametrically opposed types of organization.⁹⁸ But it would of course be a fatal mistake to argue that the manner in which state structures have spread after their invention reduplicates that in which they originated.⁹⁹

Tribes and States: the Nomadic Exception

Turning now to the relationship between tribes and states after their emergence, there can hardly be much dispute about the fact that the superiority of state structures over tribal ones has caused tribal societies to retreat to the point where they have practically disappeared today. Fried admittedly appears to say the opposite, for what he stresses is rather that states have caused tribes to emerge; but the contradiction is less serious than it may seem. Fried sees all tribes as precipitates of states: pre-state societies did not have highly discrete political units, which only emerged under the political, economic or ideological impact of states, or which were directly created by them.¹⁰⁰ Fried does not however deny that states would replicate themselves wherever they could: it was only societies incapable of sustaining complexity that would respond by developing tribal structures, in his view.¹⁰¹ And the discrete political units he sees then as developing would appear to be what I have called tribes in the specific sense of the word. His views are thus perfectly compatible with the proposition that states have undermined tribal societies in the wider or generic sense (though he may disapprove of the terminology). As regards tribes in the sense of discrete political units, Fried is right that they may often owe their existence, or at least some of their characteristics, to coexistence with states.¹⁰² But he underestimates the role of internal factors, for the Polynesians developed without any exposure to states whatever;¹⁰³ and if this is accepted, the role of the state may have been less crucial than he would have it in other cases too. Even if we grant him his case, however, his propositions in no way entail that the societies which responded by developing tribal structures were stuck with them ever after. Few tribal societies, be it in the generic or the specific sense, have coexisted with states for centuries on end without suffering erosion, except in the Middle East and Central Asia; even there the state eventually came out on top. All in all, then, it is fair to say that the state has played a more notable role in the destruction of tribes than in their creation.

Beyond this self-evident point, however, the historical relationship between tribes and states is not amenable to easy summary, and the discussion which follows will accordingly be restricted to two particular subjects, the nomadic

exception to the general rule on the one hand and the fate of tribal egalitarianism under conditions of statehood on the other.

Generally speaking, the superiority of state structures over tribal ones has caused tribes to disappear wherever the two have confronted each other. Nomads are an exception to this rule in that they have stuck to their tribal organization until recent times and in that every now and again they have proved tribes to be vastly superior.

The reasons why nomads have stuck to their tribal organization are not far to seek. In fact the reader will find them in Khazanov's *Nomads and the Outside World*, a magisterial work from which it emerges that nomads are doomed to tribalism by the very environment to which they have adapted.¹⁰⁴ They exploit land which is marginal or wholly useless to agriculturalists and which is suitable for stock-breeding only on condition of seasonal migration; the carrying capacity of such land is limited, while at the same time the proceeds of stock-breeding fluctuate wildly under nomadic conditions, so that nomadic populations are necessarily small, widely dispersed, poor and incapable of accumulating the stable surpluses required for the maintenance of states.¹⁰⁵ Since their poverty, mobility and forbidding territories also make them unattractive to external powers, they have generally avoided forcible absorption into foreign states and indeed retained their tribal organization even when their pastures happened to be located within state domains. However, many nomads have found themselves in areas too far away from states and/or bred animals too devoid of military potential to play a major role in history; but as ecology would have it, the nomads who exploited the pastures in the vicinity of the great empires of the pre-industrial world were also the nomads who bred (among other things) swift riding animals which gave them military striking power.¹⁰⁶ Whether in response to their neighbourhood with states and/or to the type of animal they bred, these were also the nomads who were tribally organized in the specific sense of the word, or in other words nomads with well-developed political communities.¹⁰⁷ We thus have a situation in which two highly developed societies, but highly developed in diametrically opposed directions, coexist and interact; in short, we have the situation in which a contest between the two is likely to occur.

It is by no means obvious that the nomads should at times have been able to win this contest. It is true that, being mobile, they could avail themselves of settled wealth from time to time, and that their tribal organization gave them a healthy contempt for 'slaves' (a 'slave' being anyone unable to defend himself, be he a slave, a civilian subject of a state or a weak member of tribal society). But their raids notwithstanding, they were frequently pitiful creatures dependent on their imperial neighbours for subsidies, food distributions and the like, not to mention trade.¹⁰⁸ Here as elsewhere, however, imperial governments were apt to trigger the formation of higher political units, including embryonic states, by their very interference in tribal affairs; and since the empires had wealth which the tribesmen both coveted as individuals and needed as members of a novel polity dependent on stable resources, the outcome of state formation among nomads, as among other tribesmen, was usually an attempt at conquest of imperial lands. This is not surprising. What is surprising is the sudden conversion of pitiful creatures into

conquerors on a sometimes gigantic scale:¹⁰⁹ the Arabs conquered the civilized world from Spain to India, destroying one empire in the process and severely mutilating another, in some 50 years, while the Mongols destroyed states of every kind from eastern Europe to Burma, narrowly missing the conquest of Egypt in the west and Japan in the east, in less than a century. What was the key to their strength?

The answer to this question takes us to the fundamental difference between tribes and states. As Cohen notes, the superiority of the state over other forms of organization lies in its ability to co-ordinate human activity for a common goal and to expand without constant liability to fission;¹¹⁰ but it acquires this ability at a cost. The common goal which the state pursues is a public one which, given the differentiated nature of the society it rules, is unlikely to coincide with the private aims of every one or even the majority of its subjects; some, usually the majority, of its subjects must accordingly be coerced, and under pre-industrial conditions most are completely excluded from participation in decision-making. A state, especially a pre-modern state, is thus incapable of swift and efficient translation of policy into action. Action is impeded by the very size of its coercive apparatus, by the sheer amount of coercion it has to do, and by the proliferation of private interests of all kinds in and around it. By contrast a tribe has no coercive apparatus and everybody participates in decision-making; as a result disunity prevails: human activity cannot be coordinated on a large scale, and fission is a normal part of the political process. But if an entire tribal society were to acquire a sense of common purpose, it is obvious that it would be able to co-operate without coercion *and* without liability to fission, or in other words that its very primitivity would give it a huge advantage over the state. This sounds like a utopian thought, and usually it has been; but it is precisely what has happened on a greater or lesser scale from time to time, notably in the cases of the Arabs and the Mongols.

How and why it has happened is a historical question which cannot be answered here, if at all, but it is clear that both nomadic mobility and tribal lack of differentiation were necessary conditions: for it is only when members of a society are in easy contact with each other and structurally identical, or nearly so, that they can have a truly common purpose, or in other words one in which private and public aims coincide.¹¹¹ It stands to reason that no society is so undifferentiated or homogeneous as to be devoid of divergent interests, and the creation of a sense of common purpose required coercion and bloodshed in the case of Arabs and Mongols alike.¹¹² But it did not require *continuous* coercion. Utterly disunited peoples were suddenly transformed as if by a magic wand into utterly united ones under a single leader whose embryonic state provided the overall co-ordination, but who relied on his followers to do the rest of their own accord. No coercive machinery had to be set in motion to raise troops, no politically abject populations had to be battered in order to pay for them, no interest groups of diverse kinds had to be overcome. Practically everyone participated, and practically everyone did so because his wishes were those of everyone else: the Arab tribesman who fought for himself fought for God because God represented the interests of the Arabs as individuals and as a collectivity alike.¹¹³ In other words, nomadic conquerors can make optimum use of their human resources and translate policy into action

without delay. It has often been noted that nomadic conquerors are physically unencumbered: they can travel through terrain in which regular armies are likely to perish, live off the land and their animals, and they have no need to defend their homeland. But they are socially unencumbered too, and it was this *social* ability to move fast and in unison which turned their physical mobility into so deadly an instrument.

Clearly, however, their strength was ephemeral. If they succeeded in acquiring imperial resources the character of their state would change,¹¹⁴ and if they did not it would disintegrate. Either way they would lose the capacity to govern their tribal homeland, so that sooner or later two societies organized along diametrically opposed lines would once more coexist and interact with all the potential for conflict that this implies. It was only when state structures were finally established in the tribal homelands that this cycle was broken. In the *long* run tribes always proved inferior to states, the intense and highly destructive outbursts of energy on the part of nomads notwithstanding.

The Fate of Tribal Egalitarianism

Given that the tribe is an evolutionary dead end, what legacy has it left? More precisely (since this is too large a question), has the political egalitarianism, for which we today have the same esteem as did the tribesmen themselves, been able to survive under conditions of fully developed statehood? The answer to this question is basically no. The extent to which the tribal past of the Greeks contributed to the formation of the Greek city-state is highly disputed, but current scholarship does not favour Morgan's view (enthusiastically adopted by Engels) that Greek democracy should be seen as the child of tribal society.¹¹⁵ It is not easy to ascertain whether tribal values played a greater role in the emergence of the northern Indian republics in which 'everybody was a king', as hostile observers put it, and which bequeathed their decision-making procedures to the Buddhist *sangha*.¹¹⁶ But the vast majority of tribal peoples have certainly lost their egalitarianism on their transition to statehood. Still, one people succeeded in retaining it, with consequences of considerable interest today.

The Arabs are the only tribal conquerors to have caused the cultural traditions of highly civilized peoples to be reshaped around their tribal heritage, with the result that their tribal values were restated in a form far transcending the narrow context in which they were born. They are alive today in Islam. This is not to say that Arab egalitarianism survived in political *practice*. On the contrary, as far as practice was concerned it was doomed by the very enormity of the Arab conquests. No sooner was the first wave of conquests over than the former convergence between private and public aims gave way to quarrels over the division and organization of the spoils. The upshot of these quarrels was a civil war (656-61) in which the Arab state might well have disintegrated, but from which it emerged instead in strengthened form, to assume an increasingly imperial appearance thereafter: within 100 years of the conquests the bulk of the former conquerors had been as thoroughly excluded from participation in decision-making as were their

predecessors in the Middle East. But the process of exclusion was accompanied by massive protest.¹¹⁷ The Umayyad dynasty which, after the end of the civil war, transferred the capital from the tribal homeland to Syria, was accused of having unlawfully monopolized power by making succession dynastic, by refraining from equitable distribution of the proceeds of the conquests, by failing to show respect for ancient norms and customs, by turning communal leadership into autocracy where it should have been theocracy,¹¹⁸ thus making it tyranny on a par with that of the Byzantines and Persians against whom the Arabs had fought in the name of God, and in general by behaving as if of the opinion that 'the land is our land, the property is our property, and the people are our slaves.'¹¹⁹ In effect, the Muslims were clamouring for a government which was both consultative and constitutional; and since another tribal legacy was activism, they fought hard enough for their ideal. Indeed, under different conditions they might well have succeeded.¹²⁰ But on the one hand nobody, not even the tribal aristocracy, had much leverage against a caliph endowed with resources so massive that his subjects were dependent on him for their income rather than the other way round;¹²¹ and on the other hand it is unlikely that the caliphs could have preserved the political unity of their huge domains if they had agreed to the demands of their subjects.¹²² (And had the political unity been lost at this early stage, the chances are that the Arabs would have been culturally absorbed and/or expelled.) In practical terms, then, the Muslims soon had to concede that autocracy had come to stay.

One might then have expected them to forget their egalitarian tradition. But the Muslims were not just heirs to a tribal past, they were also monotheists and adherents of an intrinsically egalitarian faith; and since their monotheist prophet had worked among tribes, their tribal and religious values reinforced and validated each other: there was no question of quietly forgetting either. Having lost the battle against what they perceived to be repressive government, they proceeded to reject their caliphs as illegitimate and to elaborate a charter of communal organization reflecting their own view of things; and eventually even the caliphs, in an effort to regain their moral standing, had to acknowledge this charter as the cornerstone of Islam. The charter in question is Islamic law, and it endorses and perpetuates the egalitarian tradition of the early Muslims in three major ways. Firstly, the elaboration, transmission and interpretation of the charter all vest in the community, not in the head of state (the latter having no say in these matters except in his capacity of ordinary believer), and not in an ecclesiastical organization distinct from the laity either (there being no such thing in Islam). Secondly, all free male (and to a large extent even female) adult members of the community are given practically the same rights and duties.¹²³ And thirdly, the head of state is given a minimal sphere of competence (even in public law),¹²⁴ while at the same time his subjects are empowered to elect and, under specified conditions, to depose him.¹²⁵ In short, communal leadership ('right guidance') vests in an egalitarian community, and government is constitutional in the sense that the head of state is bound by rules (as Khomeini rightly observes¹²⁶). Since, however, no machinery exists for the enforcement of these rules, it is constitutional in a sense that no modern specialist in constitutions is likely to accept,¹²⁷ but this is not to say that the charter was devoid of effect. On the one hand it rendered Islam

incapable of validating the caliphal attempt to shape an Islamic empire, with the result that political unity was lost; and on the other hand it consolidated the moral link between Islam and the many tribes inside its domains, so that tribes were drawn into non-tribal politics on a scale unknown to the pre-Islamic Middle East.¹²⁸ In short, the preservation of the tribal tradition stood in the way of full moral acceptance of the state in its pre-modern form.¹²⁹ But in modern times the charter has paid off. Contrary to the claims of modern apologists, Islam is not a democratic religion but it certainly is a *populist* religion;¹³⁰ and it is this, coupled with the fact that it is a *political* religion with a strong activist tradition, which explains why Islam, unlike other world religions, can be used to mobilize the masses for the creation of a modern state today.¹³¹

Islam thus highlights an affinity between the tribe and the modern state: both are avowedly egalitarian, both espouse mass participation. But it should be obvious that the one cannot be a short-cut to the other. The egalitarianism of tribes rests on the absence of social differentiation whereas that under conditions of statehood must be directly based thereupon; differently put, tribal egalitarianism rests on an even diffusion of power throughout the community, not on its concentration in a single agency, or in other words it rests on the very absence of a state. Their affinity notwithstanding, the tribe and the modern state represent two opposite ends of an organizational spectrum, and the transition from the one to the other requires a development so complex that one end of the spectrum is likely to have been forgotten long before the other is even in sight. The pious hope of some political scientists that the presence of tribes in the Middle East may assist the cause of democracy in that region is not likely to be fulfilled. Generally speaking, the political values of tribesmen do not long outlive their tribal organization: those of the Arab conquerors would similarly have vanished if they had not fused with monotheism to become tenets of supreme and universal validity. But the fact that they did survive in a world religion is certainly of major historical and contemporary importance.

Notes

Reprinted with revisions from J. A. Hall (ed.), *States in History*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986. Several of the revisions are based on P. Crone, 'Tribes and States in the Middle East' (review article) forthcoming in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1993.

1. Thus for example, E. Colson, 'Contemporary tribes and the development of nationalism', in J. Helm, ed., *Essays on the Problem of Tribe*, proceedings of the 1967 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society, Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 1968, p. 201.

2. Anthropologists usually identify the genus with reference to kinship alone, and kinship is of course more important than age or sex in that it can be put to far wider use; but primitive societies are nonetheless shaped with reference to all three principles, and there are hunting societies so primitive that the organizational role of sex exceeds that of kinship.

3. Cf. Royal Anthropological Institute, *Notes and Queries in Anthropology*, 6th edn, London, 1951, p. 66, where a tribe is defined as 'a politically or socially coherent and

autonomous group occupying or claiming a particular territory'. How does this distinguish the tribe from the nation-state? For other examples, see D. P. Biebuyk, 'On the concept of tribe', *Civilisations*, vol. 16, 1966, pp. 501f.

4. Cf. definitions of the tribe in terms of simple technology, subsistence level, self-sufficiency, illiteracy, absence of classes, absence of state organization and so on. A. H. Steward, *Theory of Culture Change*, Urbana, Ill. University of Illinois Press, 1955, p. 44n.; A. W. Southall, 'The illusion of tribe', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol. 5, 1970, p. 28.

5. Clearly most are ignored for the simple reason that they are not perceived (a great deal would no doubt have been made of blood groups if they had been visible). Others are perceived, but too erratic in manifestation — many societies attach social significance to epilepsy, but they could scarcely base their organization on its incidence. Still others are both perceived and regular, but ignored because they are not wanted (e.g. descent through mothers/fathers, the most famous example).

6. Cf. the outright denial of the father's/mother's role in procreation for which some societies based on unilateral descent are famed, e.g. the Trobriand Islanders.

7. Cf. the huge realm of fictitious kinship and genealogical manipulation. There is less scope for manipulation in the case of age and sex, though there are societies in which men are allowed to adopt the social role of women on condition of wearing women's clothing.

8. For a decisive refutation of the view that physical and social kinship simply happen to coincide, see E. Gellner, 'The concept of kinship' and 'Nature and society in social anthropology', in his *Cause and Meaning in the Social Sciences*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973 (reprinted from *Philosophy of Science*, vols. 27, 1960, and 30, 1963). Nobody seems to have taken the sometimes considerable discrepancy between physical and social age to mean that the two have nothing to do with each other, and the same is true of sex (though female liberationists are well on the way).

9. At least as long as science fiction remains fiction. (And though science fiction writers can envisage a society in which mechanized propagation of the species eliminates the few roles which kinship and sex retain under industrialized conditions, even they have failed to dream up ways of endowing children with the knowledge required for adult roles.) By 'nature', a term with Victorian connotations which may offend the reader, I simply mean what others call 'the human biogram'.

10. For a superb illustration of this point, see E. Gellner, *Thought and Change*, London Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964, p. 156.

11. For a brilliant analysis of 'the tribal design', see M. D. Sahlins, *Tribesmen*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1968.

12. Thus for example I. Schapera, *Government and Politics in Tribal Societies*, London Watts, 1956.

13. Thus Sahlins, *Tribesmen*, p. viii and passim.

14. It is in the nature of spectrums that one can disagree about where they begin and end. The band could be included in or excluded from the tribal spectrum at one extremity, just as the chiefdom could be included or excluded at the other (cf. M. H. Fried, 'On the concepts of "tribe" and "tribal society"', in Helm, *Problem of Tribe*, pp. 12f. (repr. from *Transactions of the New York Academy of Science*, vol. 28, 1966); M. Godelier, 'The concept of tribe: crisis of concept or crisis of the empirical foundations of anthropology?', *Diogenes*, vol. 81, 1973, pp. 15ff.). It all depends on the use to which one wishes to put the spectrum in question. I exclude the band, following Sahlins, for the simple reason that I wish to test one of Sahlins's theories.

15. Until recently, all primitive societies were assumed to do so. According to Schneider, however, this merely reflects the fact that their observers see what they expect to find; in his view we should do away with the concept of kinship altogether (D. M. Schneider, A

Critique of Kinship, Ann Arbor, 1984). Stimulating though his argument is, I cannot follow him all the way, but the possibility that kinship has often been wrongly elevated into an ordering principle or dominant idiom certainly cannot be dismissed.

16. Some Middle Eastern groups normally viewed as tribes do not claim common descent, though they consist of groups that do. One could solve this problem by calling them confederacies (cf. P. Crone 'Tribes and States in the Middle East', forthcoming in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1993. One clearly would not call them either tribes or confederacies if they acted as a group without invoking common descent above lineage level, nor would one do so if they claimed common descent above this level without ever acting as a group (after the fashion of the 'Anaza tribes', cf. below, note 26).

17. Cf. D. Easton, 'Political Anthropology', in *Biennial Review of Anthropology*, ed., B. Siegel, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1959, p. 229, whose definition of a political community I have modified.

18. Cf. A. M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 148ff. Among nomads rights in grazing land frequently remain unallocated, but those in livestock and cultivable land (if any) always vest in descent groups far smaller than the tribe.

19. Cf. Fried, 'On the concepts of "tribe"', pp. 12f, versus M. D. Sahlins, 'The segmentary lineage: an organization of predatory expansion', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 63, 1961, p. 343n. — a paper in which Sahlins's definition of the tribe does indeed invite criticism along Fried's lines.

20. Cf. the Karimojong, Turkana and many other East African tribes. Despite the objections of Schapera (*Government and Politics*, p. 216), Eisenstadt is surely right that age organization should be seen as an alternative to the use of descent (S. N. Eisenstadt, 'African Age Groups', *Africa*, vol. 24, 1954). Naturally there are peoples who use both; but where age organization carries the brunt of political integration, descent is reduced to a minor role and vice versa (cf. the neat contrast between the otherwise very similar Nuer and Karimojong in E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1940, pp. 249ff., esp. p. 254; and N. Dyson-Hudson, *Karimojong Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1966, pp. 87ff., 104, 155ff.).

21. Cf. the review of current usage by G. E. Dole, 'Tribe as the autonomous unit', in Helm, *Problem of Tribe*.

22. Thus Sahlins, 'Segmentary lineage', p. 325.

23. Cf. A. Southall, 'Stateless societies', in *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, n.p., New York and London, Macmillan and Free Press, 1968, vol. XV, p. 159.

24. Cf. Sahlins, 'Segmentary lineage', p. 326. (It is thanks to Sahlins's definition of the tribe in this paper that Fried can object that a tribe is simply an assembly of bands, cf. above, n. 17, for all that this is evidently not true of the tribe in the sense of descent group endowed with political autonomy.)

25. Cf. Southall, 'Illusion of tribe'; idem, 'Stateless societies'. It should be noted, however, that Evans-Pritchard did not identify the Nuer as a single tribe, but rather as a plurality thereof, that Lienhardt similarly identified the Dinka as a plurality of tribes (G. Lienhardt, 'The Western Dinka', in J. Middleton and D. Tait, eds., *Tribes Without Rulers*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958, pp. 102ff.), and that Warner's study of the Murngin explicitly stated that 'the tribe is almost non-existent among these people' (W. L. Warner, *A Black Civilization: A Social Study of an Australian Tribe*, New York, Harper, rev. edn 1958, p. 9, cf. pp. 35ff. The contrast between text and title neatly illustrates the need for a distinction between tribes in the generic and the specific sense of the word).

26. Thus the Lwo peoples of the Sudan, Uganda and Kenya preserve memories of their common origin in their migration tales, but these tales are not intended or understood as charters of political unity; cf. P. Curtin, S. Feierman, L. Thompson and J. Vansina, *African*

History London, Longman, 1978, pp. 130ff. Similarly, the tribes of the Arabian 'Anaza group are of common origin in the sense that 'Anaza was once a single tribe, but though their genealogies proclaim them to be of common descent, they never act together; cf. *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2nd edn, Leiden and London, E. J. Brill, 1960-, s.v. 'Anaza').

27. In the 680s the Qudā'a tribes of Syria proclaimed themselves to be no longer sons of MaCadd, but rather sons of Himyar, viz. Yemenis; and though genealogists remembered their previous affiliation, they sided with Yemeni tribes (both real and spurious) thereafter; cf. P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses, the Evolution of the Islamic Polity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980, pp. 34f. There is nothing unusual about this, apart from the fact that memories of the change were preserved. It is well known that genealogies tend to be more or less correct at the level of family and lineage, but to express purely political relationships at the level of tribe and beyond (they remain plausible because they are true where they matter most in everyday life).

28. Biebuyck, 'Concept of tribe', pp. 509f.

29. On these tribes, see A. Musil, *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins*, New York, American Geographical Society, 1928; D. P. Cole, *Nomads of the Nomads*, Arlington Heights, Ill. AHM Publishing Corporation, 1975.

30. Cf. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer*, p. 5; Dole, 'Tribe as the autonomous unit', p. 95.

31. Thus Southall, 'Stateless societies', p. 159; idem, 'Illusion of tribe', pp. 43f.

32. Cf. G. E. von Grunebaum, 'The nature of Arab unity before Islam', *Arabia*, vol. 10, 1963.

33. Gellner rightly notes that Middle Eastern tribes are political units, that their cultural role is not very marked, and that they do not 'fill out' the world, but identify themselves in terms borrowed from a wider civilization (E. Gellner, 'The tribal society and its enemies', in R. Tapper, ed., *The Conflict between Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan*, New York, Croom Helm, 1983, p. 436). But the implicit contrast with non-Middle Eastern tribes simply shows that Middle Eastern and non-Middle Eastern anthropologists use the word 'tribe' differently. If tribes are political units, they are unlikely ever to be cultural ones (whether they identify themselves in terms borrowed from a wider civilization or shared by a local people); conversely, if they are cultural units, they are unlikely ever to be political ones (whether political communities within them are large, small or occasionalist).

34. Southall, 'Stateless societies'.

35. It is of course true that the tribe may be a relative concept in a segmentary context (cf. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer*, p. 148), but this is not what Southall appears to be arguing.

36. Cf. Khazanov *Nomads*, p. 150, and the references cited there, to which many others could be added; Cole, *Nomads of the Nomads*, p. 94.

37. Among the Nuer only fellow-tribesmen recognize the obligation to pay blood-money in compensation for homicide (Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer*, p. 121), but among the bedouin everyone does so; the sum payable for a fellow-tribesman may however be considerably higher than for an outsider (Musil, *Rwala*, p. 47; for a pre-Islamic example, see P. Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 52). For other rules, see Musil, loc. cit.

38. Exceptions to this rule are few indeed, as Khazanov rightly notes (*Nomads*, p. 150).

39. See, for example, Cole, *Nomads of the Nomads*, p. 93.

40. Cf. Crone, 'Tribes and States in the Middle East'.

41. Khazanov subscribes to the view that there are no characteristics of socio-political organization which are to be found exclusively among nomads (*Nomads*, p. 192). But he also holds that it is mainly among pure nomads that descent is the key principle of socio-political organization (ibid., p. 139, where pure nomads are the opposite of other kinds of nomads, but where one would assume the contrast to apply to settled tribesmen too). To my knowledge nobody has made a systematic study of the question.

42. Given that the tribe in the specific sense of the word is strongly associated with nomads, it would be plausible only if mankind had passed from hunting to agriculture via a pastoralist stage. But pastoral nomadism emerged after the invention of agriculture (cf. the discussion in Khazanov, *Nomads*, pp. 85ff.).

43. L. H. Morgan, *Ancient Society*, Cambridge The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964 (first published 1877), esp. pp. 12, 62f.

44. Sahlins, 'Segmentary lineage', p. 324; idem, *Tribesmen*; E. R. Service, *Primitive Social Organization; an Evolutionary Perspective*, New York, Random House, 1962, rev. edn., 1971.

45. When Fried queried the extent to which tribes can be distinguished from bands, Service responded by abolishing the concepts of *both* band *and* tribe, merging them for evolutionary purposes in the Egalitarian Society; at the same time he merged the chiefdom and the primitive state in the Hierarchical Society, which supposedly developed via the Empire-State into Archaic Civilization or Classical Empire (E. R. Service, *Cultural Evolutionism, Theory in Practice*, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971, p. 157). Despite his later work in the same vein (idem, *Origins of the State and Civilization: the Process of Cultural Evolution*, New York, W. W. Norton, 1975), this scarcely represents an improvement: the evolutionary phases are now so broad as to be virtually meaningless.

46. Thus for example R. McC. Adams, *The Evolution of Urban Society*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1966 (where the evolutionary assumptions are derived primarily from Morgan, secondarily from Kirchhoff rather than Sahlins and Service), the Soviet scholars (ultimately inspired by Morgan too) in I. M. Diakonoff, ed., *Ancient Mesopotamia, A Collection of Studies by Soviet Scholars*, Moscow, Sändig Reprint Verlag, 1969; and I. J. Gelb (see, for example, his evolutionary scheme in his 'From freedom to slavery', in D. O. Edzard, ed., *Gesellschaftsklassen im alten Zweistromland und in den angrenzenden Gebieten*, Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Munich, 1972, p. 81). The assumption that states must have emerged from a tribal organization gives a curiously cyclical character to Mesopotamian history: since the publication of R. A. Fernea's *Shaykh and E'fendi: Changing Patterns of Authority among the El Shabana of Southern Iraq*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University, 1970, it has had a distinct tendency to begin and end with the same El Shabana tribes (thus most notably M. Gibson, 'Violation of fallow and engineered disaster in Mesopotamian civilization' in T. E. Downing and M. Gibson, eds, *Irrigation's Impact on Society*, Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1974; idem, 'By stage and cycle to Sumer', in D. Schmandt-Besserat, ed., *The Legacy of Sumer*, Malibu, Udena Publications, 1976, p. 54).

47. Sahlins, 'Segmentary lineage', p. 324; idem, *Tribesmen*, p. 3; Service, *Primitive Social Organization*, rev. edn, p. 99.

48. Unlike the first assumption, the second is implicit. Had Sahlins and Service made it explicit, they would presumably have modified their evolutionary scheme, for they cannot in general be accused of misunderstanding the nature of either tribes or states.

49. The much later Aztecs are obviously irrelevant to this question (*pace* Adams, *Evolution of Urban Society*).

50. For a convenient survey of Mesopotamian influence on Egypt, see W. A. Ward, 'Relations between Egypt and Mesopotamia from prehistoric times to the end of the Middle Kingdom', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 7, 1964, which goes so far as to have the (here Syrian) bearers of this influence invade Egypt and set up the First Dynasty all the while denying that Mesopotamian influence played a formative role in Egyptian state-formation. Its (once widely accepted) role as a catalyst is also brushed aside by J. J. Jansen, 'The early state in Ancient Egypt', in H. J. M. Claessen and P. Skalnik, eds, *The Early State*, The Hague, Paris and New York, Mouton, 1978, pp. 217f.

51. Adams, *Evolution of Urban Society*, chapter 3, with reference to P. Kirchhoff, 'The principles of clanship in human society', in M. H. Fried, ed., *Readings in Anthropology*, New York, Thomas Y. Crowell, 1959, vol. II, p. 268, as far as the conical clan (viz. a clan stratified on the basis of seniority) is concerned.

52. This is not meant as a criticism of Adams's approach which is, as he says, contextual rather than textual. It is extremely interesting to see scrappy evidence ordered in the light of a conjectural context, and Adams is remarkably good at indicating just how conjectural his reconstruction is. But the evidence cannot be said to vindicate, or even to suggest, the context proposed.

53. Cf. I. M. Diakonoff, 'Sale of land in Pre-Sargonic Sumer', in *Papers Presented by the Soviet Delegation at the XXIII International Congress of Orientalists*, Moscow, Publishing House of USSR Academy of Sciences, 1954 (followed by Adams, *Evolution of Urban Society*, pp. 83f.), and other publications by the same author, practically all listed in the editorial note to idem, 'Socio-economic classes in Babylonia and the Babylonian concept of social stratification', in Edzard, *Gesellschaftsklassen*, p. 41; I. Gelb, 'Household and family in Early Mesopotamia', in E. Lipinski, ed., *State and Temple Economy in the Ancient Near East*, Leuven, Department Oriëntalistiek Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1979, vol. I, pp. 68ff.

54. The evidence comes mainly in the form of contracts of sale in which relatives appear as co-sellers: Gelb counts the kin group as large when the co-sellers number five or more ('Household and family', p. 69). According to Diakonoff, we hear of up to 600 co-sellers ('Sale of land', p. 28; repeated by Adams, *Evolution of Urban Society*, p. 84), but this rests on a tendentious interpretation of the so-called Manistusu obelisk, in which small clusters of related co-sellers do indeed appear, but in which the 600 men referred to by Diakonoff are not among them (cf. the very different interpretation of this text by L. W. King, *A History of Sumer and Akkad*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1910, pp. 206ff., followed by C. J. Gadd, 'The cities of Babylonia', in *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 1, part 2, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 3rd. edn, 1970, pp. 448ff.; for an attempt to reconstruct the kinship structure of what was by then Akkadian rather than Sumerian society on the basis of this text, see Gelb, 'Household and family', pp. 73f., 81ff.).

55. A more cautious formulation would be that the philological foundations for an opinion either way scarcely exist, and that non-specialists are particularly badly placed to decide whether a certain term is a kinship term or otherwise. But some of the arguments adduced by anthropologically-minded Akkadianists have a well-worn quality to them: animal names of early rulers and animal emblems of early cities are supposed to be evidence of past totemism, etc. (cf. Gelb, 'Household and family', p. 94). Animal names of Arab tribes were likewise once supposed to be evidence of a totemistic past, but who believes that now?

56. When Gelb compared the semi-free *gurius* class with Roman *glebae adscripti*, English serfs and Greek metics, he had simply misunderstood the nature of metics (I. J. Gelb, 'Social stratification in the Old Akkadian Period', in *Proceedings of the XXV International Congress of Orientalists*, Moscow, 1962-3, vol. 1, p. 226. It is clear from the Akkadianization of lower Iraq that Semitic newcomers to Sumerian cities were not relegated to a special status; indeed, their integration seems to have been accomplished with minimal friction; cf. T. Jacobsen, 'The assumed conflict between Sumerians and Semites in Early Mesopotamian history', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 59, 1939, reprinted in his *Towards the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1970; cf. also the more recent discussion in *IX. Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale: 'Aspects du contact suméroakkadien'*, Geneva, Musée d'art et d'histoire, 1960.

57. For example vis-à-vis the tent-dwelling Martu (Amorites), who are not perceived as a descent group at all (G. Buccellati, *The Amorites of the Ur III Period*, Naples, Istituto Orientale di Napoli, 1966, pp. 330ff.). In general, the Sumerians do not provide much evidence of awareness of ethnicity (cf. H. Limet, 'L'étranger dans la société sumérienne', in Edzard, *Gesellschaftsklassen*).

58. Cf. the myth in which Inanna induces Enki to give her all the fundamental institutions of Sumerian civilization: the long list of her acquisitions includes basic aspects of human society such as sexual intercourse, speech, adornment, rectitude and eldership, but not knowledge of ancestry, genealogical purity, kinship solidarity or the like. (S. N. Kramer, 'Aspects of Mesopotamian society. Evidence from the Sumerian literary sources', in H. Klengel, ed., *Beiträge zur sozialen Struktur des alten Vorderasiens*, Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1971, p. 9).

59. Cf. Jacobsen, 'An Ancient Mesopotamian Trial for Homicide', in his *Tammuz*, p. 209; compare idem, 'The myth of Inanna and Bilulu', *ibid.*, p. 55.

60. In this respect the Gilgamesh epic is strikingly different from other heroic literature, be it Greek, Germanic or Icelandic.

61. C. J. Gadd, *Ideas of Divine Rule in the Ancient East*, London, Oxford University Press 1948, pp. 5f.; idem, 'Cities of Babylonia', p. 101.

62. T. Jacobsen, 'Primitive democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 2, 1943; idem, 'Early political development in Mesopotamia', *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, vol. 52, 1957 (both reprinted in his *Tammuz*); cf. also G. Evans, 'Ancient Mesopotamian assemblies', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 78, 1958.

63. Jacobsen wonders whether women were once members of the assemblies too with reference to Inanna's participation in divine deliberations, but this seems unlikely. Being a goddess, Inanna was powerful, viz. endowed with male prerogatives, and there is no general sense of female participation in the myths.

64. This statement is based on a single source, viz. the story of 'Gilgamesh and Agga' in which Gilgamesh seeks the consent of the elders for warfare against Kish; the elders withhold their consent, whereupon Gilgamesh convenes the men of the city, who overrule the elders (cf. Jacobsen, 'Primitive democracy', pp. 165f.; there is a full translation by Kramer in J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2nd edn, 1955, pp. 44ff.). It is of course impossible to make any firm statements about the division of power between king and assembly on the basis of so limited material, but that there was a division is clear.

65. Cf. Jacobsen, 'Ancient Mesopotamian trial for homicide', p. 204; I. M. Diakonoff, 'On the structure of Old Babylonian society', in Klengel, *Beiträge*, pp. 20, 22f.

66. Gadd, 'Cities of Babylonia', p. 101.

67. For a helpful introduction to the controversy, see B. Foster, 'A new look at the Sumerian temple state', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 24, 1981, which drives a few more nails into the coffin of the temple-state theory as originally proposed; for the alternative (but no less controversial) views which are now being debated, see G. Komoróczy, 'Zu den Eigentumsverhältnissen in der altbabylonischen Zeit: das Problem der Privatwirtschaft', in Lipiriski, *State and Temple Economy*, vol. II.

68. Cf. the convenient summary by C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, 'The economic world of Sumer', in Schmandt-Besserat, *Legacy of Sumer*, p. 63.

69. Thus the writings of Gelb and Diakonoff (Diakonoff and other Soviet scholars being adherents of the *obscina*); see for example Gelb's evolutionary scheme referred to above, n. 43, and I. M. Diakonoff, 'Socio-economic classes in Babylonia and the Babylonian concept of social stratification', in Edzard, *Gesellschaftsklassen* (with comments by Gelb and others).

70. The crucial problem here is accounting for a number of early contracts of land sale to which both Diakonoff and Gelb have called attention (cf. above, n. 51). Practically all involve kings and their associates; indeed the only information we have about one early king is that he sold land (D. O. Edzard, 'Problèmes de la royauté dans la période présargonique', in P. Garelli, ed., *Le Palais et la royauté*, Paris, Paul Geuthner, 1974, p. 143). But though one could easily account for kings using their position to sell off temple land (which was supposed to be inalienable), kings and others do not just sell, but also buy land, and it is on this basis that Diakonoff has constructed his picture of a beleaguered village community. The contracts raise two fundamental questions, viz. where in relation to the city-state were these lands located, and to what extent were the sales genuine sales as opposed to labour and service agreements in (what to us appears as) disguise? After all, a Sumerian contract of sale is not necessarily endowed with the same meaning as a Roman one. To the best of my knowledge, the excitement of seeing land being sold has been such that neither question has been even raised.

71. 'If nothing but royal (or temple) land and royal (or temple) servants existed in the south of Mesopotamia until the establishment of Semitic domination, then any mention of self-government organs there becomes enigmatic', as Diakonoff remarks ('On the Structure of Old Babylonian society', pp. 19f.). Note the interchangeability of 'temple' and 'royal'. It does of course become enigmatic if we envisage temple and palace as twins, but this is precisely what we should not do.

72. Service does not see this point either: the political egalitarianism of the early city-states appears to him as a puzzling *departure* from pure theocracy (*Origins of the State*, p. 209).

73. Here we are getting into contentious matters. For an attractive account based on Jacobsen, see H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that was Babylon*, London, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1962, pp. 37ff. (it is gratifying to see that Saggs sticks to the unfashionable theory of temple economy); for a more recent discussion, which is not incompatible with it, see Edzard, 'Royauté'.

74. When Inanna made off with the basic institutions of Sumerian civilization, her acquisitions included the crafts of the woodworker, metalworker, leather worker, smith, mason, basket-weaver and scribe (Kramer, 'Aspects of Mesopotamian society', p. 9). Sumerian has hundreds of terms for crafts and professions, as Gelb notes ('Approaches to the study of ancient society', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 87, 1967, p. 7).

75. Gelb, *loc. cit.* (Gelb finds this strange in view of the degree of division of labour).

76. Saggs, *Babylon*, p. 169.

77. M. D. Coe, 'San Lorenzo and Olmec civilization' in E. P. Benson, ed., *Dumbarton Oaks Conference on the Olmecs*, Washington, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, 1968.

78. M. Mann, *The Source of Social Power*, vol. I, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 42.

79. Mann, *Sources*, vol. I, p. 80. Irrigation was a much adduced, but unsatisfactory, explanatory factor before Mann took it up (cf. Lamberg-Karlovsky, 'Economic World of Sumer', p. 62).

80. Mann (*Sources*, vol. I, p. 119) takes his model to be on weak ground here because there seems to be little evidence of socially and territorially fixed agriculture in Maya America. But the missing evidence is supplied by H. Hammond, *Maya Civilization*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp. 160ff: the Mayas constructed raised fields in swampy areas by draining marshy river basins (using the canals between them to raise fish); it is possible that intensive agriculture in river areas was initial and that slash-and-burn agriculture was a response to population pressure; at all events, raised fields were so widespread that their contribution to the economy must have been fundamental. (Cf. P.

Crone, *Pre-industrial Societies*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989, p. 147, where I make the same point, but without references.)

81. M. E. L. Mallowan, 'The development of cities from al-'Ubaid to the end of Uruk 5', in *Cambridge Ancient History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 3rd edn, 1970, vol. I, part 1, p. 330.

82. T. Jacobsen, ed. and tr., *The Sumerian King-List* Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1939, p.71, cf. pp. 58ff.; and the reference given above, n.55 (this myth is extremely well told by Saggs, *Babylon*, p. 36).

83. Mallowan, 'Development of cities', pp. 333ff.; Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* p. 101; Gadd, 'Cities of Babylonia', p. 127, cf. p. 126; H.-G. Güterbock, 'Die historische Tradition und ihre literarische Gestaltung bei Babyloniern und Hethitern bis 1200' *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, vol. 42, 1934, pp. 54f., 56f.

84. It is worth stressing that Service's theory is no more correct in its revised version than in its original form (cf. above, n. 42).

85. Such as periodic redistribution of land, generosity, potlatches or simply exclusion (after the fashion of smiths in bedouin and other societies).

86. E.g. by ranking in accordance with descent and/or seniority.

87. A point seen by Fried, 'On the concepts', p. 17.

88. See for example H. J. M. Claessen, 'Early state in Tahiti' in Claessen and Skalník, *The Early State*.

89. Sahlins, *Tribesmen*, p. 92; cf. I. Goldman, 'The evolution of Polynesian societies', in A. Howard, ed., *Polynesia, Readings in a Culture Area*, Scranton, London and Toronto, Chandler, 1971 (repr. from S. Diamond, ed., *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1960).

90. Cf. Claessen, 'Tahiti', p. 446.

91. Kinship is not very visible, and it is precisely for this reason that it is more open to cultural development than either sex or age. Still, it is observable that a woman has children and accordingly that her sons are brothers.

92. The fact that industrialism was only invented once is no objection given that its very invention made the process of diffusion almost instantaneous.

93. This is not of course to say that those who did not participate in mainstream developments invariably proceeded to make breakthroughs. The majority must have lost out then as later.

94. See for example Service, *Cultural Evolutionism*, chapter 3, for an eloquent account of the discontinuous nature of evolution.

95. Anti-diffusionism began its career as a healthy reaction against the assumption that tracing the cultural origins of a phenomenon amounted to explaining it, but we are surely past having to argue against this assumption by now. What is more, the reaction soon became an over-reaction. Steward, for example, wondered whether diffusion could seriously distort the 'natural' regularity of change: 'one may fairly ask whether each time a society accepts diffused culture, it is not an independent recurrence of cause and effect' (*Culture Change*, p. 182). This is an odd suggestion: are we really to take it that the arrival of factories in Somalia or Tibet constitutes an independent recurrence of industrialization in Britain? Given that we live in a time at which diffusion is rapidly changing the face of the earth, it might be wiser to give some thought to the phenomenon than to persist in belittling its significance.

96. 'It is perhaps because we can ascribe a Mesopotamian origin to the most startling and sudden development — massive monuments with niched façades — that Mesopotamia appears to be the motivating force behind the seemingly abrupt appearance of the historic age in Egypt', as Ward puts it ('Relations between Egypt and Mesopotamia', p. 134). So

indeed. For if massive monuments with niched façades were instrumental in the emergence of civilization in Sumeria, it is hard not to infer that it was a Sumerian idea which chiefs of one kind or another put to their own use in Egypt.

97. The useful distinction between pristine and secondary state formation was introduced by M. H. Fried, 'On the evolution of social stratification and the state', in Diamond, *Culture in History*, p. 713: pristine states are those which developed out of local conditions and not in response to pressures emanating from an already highly organized but separate political entity, whereas secondary states are those which developed in response to pressures, direct or indirect, from existing states. Differently put, pristine states are those for which state structures actually had to be invented, whereas secondary states are those for which they merely had to be adopted. Fried discusses the number of pristine states and considers (but does not favour) the possibility that there were only two, one in the Old World and one in the New, in his *The Evolution of Political Society*, New York, Random House, 1967, pp. 231ff.

98. Cf. A. I. Gurevich, 'The early state in Norway', and L. A. Sedov, 'Angkor: society and state', both in Claessen and Skalník, *The Early State*, for two examples from very different parts of the world.

99. Similarly the evolution of industrialism in its area of birth is quite different from its propagation in new lands, as Service lucidly explains (*Cultural Evolutionism*, p. 44). But the sheer fact that states emerged so long ago makes us apt to ignore this fact in practice.

100. Fried, 'On the concepts', pp. 15ff; id., *The Notion of Tribe*, Menlo Park, Cal., Cummings Publ. Co., 1975, esp. pp. 185ff (I am grateful to John Hall for sending me a xerox of this book, which I was unable to locate when I wrote the first version of this paper).

101. M. H. Fried, 'Tribe to State or State to Tribe in Ancient China?' in D. N. Keightly (ed.), *The Origins of Chinese Civilization*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1983, pp. 473, 479.

102. Cf. below, note 107; Crone, 'Tribes and States in the Middle East'.

103. Cf. the references in notes 88-9. It would not be possible to claim that this organization was a response to the arrival of the very Europeans who described it: description was instantaneous whereas a response of the order in question would require considerable time.

104. Khazanov, *Nomads*, pp. 69ff, 152ff. (for the full reference, see above, n. 16).

105. But Khazanov, *Nomads*, p. 152, nonetheless explains both the periodic emergence of nomad polities and their instability with reference to the contradiction between the political need for unity and the economic need for freedom of action. It is hard to believe that this contradiction (which is not explored) was of decisive importance.

106. History would have been very different if Central Asia had happened to be suitable for the herding of reindeer rather than horses, Arabia for the herding of cattle rather than camels.

107. According to Khazanov, the political integration of nomads is related above all to their relations with the outside world (*Nomads*, pp. 148ff, 169ff.). But the large territories required for the herding of camels and horses and the intensity of raiding and warfare which they entail must have been factors of comparable importance, and Khazanov's analysis of the low degree of political integration among reindeer pastoralists (esp. p. 172) does not suggest that internal factors mostly played 'a secondary and attendant role' (pp. 151f). The factors behind the 'upper levels of socio-political organization', viz. the nature of the tribal organization itself, are surely not identical with those behind the periodic emergence of nomadic chiefdoms and states. (Both seem to be subsumed under the label of 'political tribalism'.) Nomad relations with the outside world no doubt played a role in both, but it is

only with regard to the second that Khazanov's insistence on their overriding importance convinces.

108. For the various ways in which nomads have been dependent on settled societies, see Khazanov, *Nomads*, pp. 212ff.

109. They have not of course always invaded societies as members of a state, and even state formation did not always, or even usually, lead to conquest on a gigantic scale. For a historical survey of nomadic state formation and its consequences, see Khazanov, *Nomads*, chapter 5.

110. R. Cohen, 'Introduction', in R. Cohen and E. R. Service, eds, *Origins of the State*, Philadelphia, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978, p. 4.

111. In the Arab case, the leaders of the conquests were settled tribesmen, as were many other participants, and the tendency these days is to belittle the military contribution of the nomads; but it is still difficult to belittle their enabling role.

112. Much more so in the case of the Mongols than in that of the Arabs, who had a greater sense of cultural unity and for whom the common purpose was presented in religious form (two factors likely to be related).

113. Cf. P. Crone, *Mexican Trade and the Rise of Islam* (forthcoming), Princeton, Princeton University Press, chapter 10. Since God told the Arabs to go and enrich themselves, the old question whether they fought for God or for booty is meaningless.

114. Both the Arabs and the Mongols continued to conquer after they had transferred their capitals from their tribal homelands to imperial centres; but they increasingly did so as wielders of coercive state machinery rather than as leaders of self-firing nomads, and in due course even this residual energy was lost.

115. Morgan, *Ancient Society*, chapters 8-10; F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan*, ed. E. B. Leacock, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1972, chapters 4-5. Both make a comparable argument for Rome. That the emergence of republics characterized by greater or lesser degrees of mass participation in politics should be explained with reference to the tribal legacy of the peoples among whom they emerged is an attractive idea which makes good sense in the light of most conventional accounts of the formation of the city state; but it fails to survive exposure to D. Roussel, *Tribu et cité*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1976 (cf. also F. Bourriot, *Recherches sur la nature du génos*, thesis, Lille and Paris 1976). There seems to be no way of disputing Roussel's conclusion that the tribal organization of the Greeks had disintegrated long before the emergence of the city-state. He does not deny that there are residues of such organization or that the Greeks were prone to think in kinship terms; but he decisively refutes the conventional view, crucial for Morgan's interpretation, that the descent groups known as *phylai* into which all city states were divided originated as genuine tribal groups. Snodgrass's objection that there is archaeological evidence of cultural units best identified as tribal ones in archaic Greece rests on the confusion between cultural and political groupings with which the reader is by now familiar (A. Snodgrass, *Archaic Greece*, London, Melbourne and Toronto, Dent, 1980, p. 26).

116. Cf. B. Law, *Some Ksatriya Tribes of Ancient India*, Calcutta and Simla, Thacker, Spink and Co., 1923.

117. What follows is based on P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, chapter 6 and *passim*.

118. *Viz. mulk* (literally 'kingship') rather than *khilafa* (deputyship on behalf of God or, classically, succession to the Prophet). I owe the felicitous rendering of this dichotomy as autocracy versus theocracy to Dr F. W. Zimmermann.

119. Thus Abu Hamza al-Khārijī (Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, appendix 3).

120. The sense that the caliphate and, according to some, even governorships should be elective was so strong that under conditions of civil war one caliph (Yazid III) and one governor (Nasr b. Sayyār) endorsed it, the former undertaking to step down if he failed to execute the policies sketched out in his accession speech and the latter agreeing to participate in the nomination of electors charged both with the election of governors for a particular locality and with the formulation of the rules they were to follow (Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, chapter 6).

121. Practically all taxes were paid by non-Muslims, not by Muslims, the exconquerors receiving a share of them in the form of stipends. The Umayyad caliphs are constantly being accused of iniquitous distribution of the revenues, not of iniquitous distribution of tax burdens.

122. It is hard to see how a political community of that size could have agreed on procedures for the election of caliphs and governors, organized such procedures, and survived the constant disruption which elective offices would have entailed.

123. A few privileges in favour of Arabs survive, but they are of minor importance.

124. As Finer observes, government is not limited in the sense that the manner in which it arrives at and implements its decisions is subject to controls, but rather in the sense that the area within which it may make decisions is restricted (cf. S. E. Finer, 'Note towards a history of constitutions', in V. Bogdanor (ed.), *Constitutions in Democratic Politics*, Aldershot, Gower, 1988, p. 18). But contrary to what Finer implies, the area is a good deal more restricted in Islamic than in Jewish law. According to Finer, Jewish monarchs were bound by the Mosaic code, but had a free hand as far as the army, taxation, police and the organization of the judiciary were concerned because the code gave them no guidance on such questions; and he believes the same to be true of Muslim monarchs. But Islamic law does give guidance on such questions. Muslim rulers may not have followed this guidance in practice, but unlike Jewish monarchs they violated the code by behaving as they saw fit in such matters.

125. This is only true of Sunni, not Shi'ite Islam. (The Shi'ites chose to beautify dynastic succession and absolutism by vesting the caliphate in descendants of the Prophet endowed with superhuman knowledge, an idea which proved as difficult to translate into practice as constitutionalism.) For one view of the rules of the game, see Y. Ibish, *The Political Doctrine of Al-Baqillani*, Beirut, American University of Beirut Publication of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Oriental Series 44, 1966, chapter 4.

126. Ruh Allāh Khumayni, *Islam and Revolution, Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, trans. H. Algar, Berkeley, Mizan Press, 1981, p. 55.

127. It fails Finer's test in that Islamic law, though well endowed with specificity, has no enforceability as far as its regulation of government is concerned: it lacks both an authoritative device for signalling that a fundamental law has been breached and sanctions which will punish such a breach (cf. Finer, 'Notes', p. 19). Sartori might have classified it as a façade constitution in that its *garantiste* features, though real enough on paper, are normally disregarded in practice (cf. G Sartori, 'Constitutionalism: a preliminary discussion', *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 56, 1962, p. 861).

128. Gellner explains the importance of tribesmen in Muslim politics with reference to the relative weight of pastoralism and agriculture in the arid region (E. Gellner, *Muslim Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 20); but where in the Middle East did tribesmen play a major role in non-tribal politics before the arrival of Islam? Certainly not in the Achaemenid and Sasanid empires, or in the eastern Mediterranean under Greek and Roman rule; they did not even do so in North Africa (on which Gellner's observations are based), though the North African adoption of Christianity led to some suggestive stirrings (the Donatist *circumcelliones*). Islam made a crucial difference not only in that it gave townsmen and tribesmen a common idiom (cf. Gellner, *ibid.*, p. 24; Christianity

had done the same), but also in that this idiom originated in a tribal context and remained highly suitable for tribal use

129. This argument is developed in Crone, *Slaves on Horses*.

130. *Vox populi is vox dei* to the extent that God's will is incarnate in a law elaborated and preserved by representatives of the community, but this does not give the *populus* a share in government, only in the definition of what it ought to be. If the Muslims had developed a machinery for the enforcement of the law vis-à-vis the sovereign, they would indeed have developed a form of government which could loosely be described as representative democracy, but this they did not. In legal theory the caliphate remained an elective office, but in legal theory too the election can be performed by one man: having made their statement of principle, the lawyers chose to draw its political teeth in order to prevent further dissension and bloodshed (the concern for the welfare and unity of the community being very strong indeed). They did not seek to place institutional checks on the exercise of power, but rather to withdraw as much of communal life as they could from its domains.

131. Cf. Gellner, *Muslim Society*, pp. 4f, 65, 67f. There is of course also a strong quietist tradition in Islam: from the ninth century onwards scholars increasingly exhorted the believers to live by the law and to endure such rulers as they had; and Imāmi Shī'ism has more of a quietist baggage than any other version of Islam. But political activism represents the original pattern and is thus there for anyone to rediscover. What Khomeini rails against in his speeches on Islamic government is precisely the pattern whereby rulers rule as they see fit while religious scholars discuss ordinances 'of menstruation and parturition' and recite Qur'ānic verses which are never applied. Were religion and politics separate in the days of the Prophet? Did not the Prophet apply the law? Did not 'Alī make use of the sword? Islam came to establish order in society, it is the religion of militant individuals committed to truth and justice; no-one should passively await the imam of the age (Khumayni, *Islam and Revolution*, section I). In terms of both style, temperament and ideas he has extraordinary affinities with the Khārijite preachers of the Umayyad period.

Commentary

The argument of M. Mann's 'States, Ancient and Modern' centres around the conditions necessary to create large scale networks of social interaction. In agrarian circumstances, economic means are incapable of creating such systems: transport tends to be so poor that economic relations are necessarily segmented. One principal way in which larger interaction has been made possible is by military means. Both Rome and China had walls at the edges of their empire, and it was within the boundaries established by military means that taxation became possible. In these circumstances, Mann argues, military power is productive since it allows for orderly relations. In contrast, modern conditions — above all, revolutions of rail, sea and satellite communication — make it possible for economic relations to integrate larger spaces. In a sense, this latter point means that economic views, whether of liberalism or of Marxism, stressing the increasing irrelevance of state power in modernity at least have the semblance of coherence. But whatever sense they do have must be limited, Mann argues, by a realisation of two facts about political power within the industrial era. First, modernity has witnessed the rise of statist regimes as clearly bent on coercion as on production: this behaviour may no longer be absolutely necessary and there may be a secular trend against it, but there can be no doubt about its effect on the historical record. Second, the international market is not, as economic accounts imagine, an area free from politics. Very much to the contrary, the terms of the market are heavily influenced by the leading state of capitalism, as is obvious once we note the relationship between American ideals and the actually existing institutions of capitalist society.

C. Tilly's 'War Making and State Making as Organised Crime' takes a very different tack from Mann, concentrating on the processes by means of which modern states developed. At the core of the analysis is an insistence on one uniqueness of north-western Europe, namely that it comprised a system of competing states. Where the sheer size of Rome and China allowed them to fend off or absorb peoples external to their worlds, revealingly called barbarians, European states had to emulate the social and political techniques of the leading edge of very nearly equal rivals in order to be able to survive at all. Tilly describes the way in which states developed bureaucracies in order to extract taxes, a central consequence of which was to territorialise social relations to such an extent that dynastic states became first national and eventually nation states. One of the key engines in the creation of modernity has been that of state competition.

P. Burke's 'City States' adds to awareness of the diversity of states in history. More important, his typology and analysis add to what Tilly has said. In the long run, independent city states within Europe, with the exception of Monaco, came to

be absorbed inside larger national units. Nonetheless, the period of independence granted to cities in Europe by multipolarity, allowed them to make an immense contribution to civilisational processes. The burgher was king within the free city, and that condition was used to pioneer the second key engine of modernity, that of an ongoing economic intensification of social life.