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H.AMBORN (WEST GERMANY)

SOCIAL DIVISION OF WORK IN TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURAL SOCIETIES (SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA)

In most societies, social division of work promotes hierarchization. Prominent examples are the Western societies and, in the Third World the caste system of India. Ethiopia seems to be no exception to this. In the highly stratified Amhara society, there were only three occupations desirable for a man: to be a soldier, a farmer, or a clergyman. Thus, in order to gain social influence, an Amhara would try to gather many clients to support him on his way up to become an army officer, a respected landlord, or an abbot. Getting a clientele depended on land rights. Outside of these three occupations lay the field of handicrafts. In traditional Amhara society, any free member of a community with genealogical ties to this community could claim land of his own and, according to his capacities, extend it. Since craftsmen did not accumulate land, they were excluded from the possibility of having clients. Therefore, no Amhara would aspire to be an artisan. Consequently, potters, smiths, tanners and others were found at the bottom of the hierarchical order. If possible, such occupations were even shifted to other ethnic groups. The best known example for this are the Falasha who, in a process beginning in the Middle Ages, were increasingly made to specialize in handicrafts.

On the other hand, there are some African examples showing an opposite tendency in that division of work did not end in oppression or caste formation. In this paper I want to show that we can find such a tendency in Ethiopia too. Looking at the ethnographic literature, one would, however, hardly expect to find it there. Even in the south, where societies are less stratified than in the north, we are told of craftsmen as suppressed or despised groups, pariahs, or outsiders. Sometimes, when the analysis is more careful and profound, their position is considered ambiguous or ambivalent.

Restudying this field in the Burji-Konso cluster and especially with Dully speaking peoples (ethnic groups which are all more or less acephalous), I became convinced of the necessity to rethink our interpretations. In my opinion, the notions we have concerning the relationship between agriculturists and craftsmen have become standard concepts for two reasons:

Firstly, most studies were carried out only within the dominant social group. And this means, within the agricultural group alone (an exception is the research on the Dime).

Secondly, the studies confined themselves to the description of empirical differences between the two groups. However, generalizations based on such phenomenological studies are no substitute for theoretical analysis. They led, for example, to such well known notions as, "the craftsmen are alien elements in their own society".

Since Schurtz we are familiar with two categories: craftsmen are either respected or despised - a dichotomy going back to European medieval times when there was a social distinction between honourable and dishonourable occupations. For some parts of Africa, it may even be correct to say that craftsmen are treated with disdain or regarded as outsiders or aliens. But such observations are of little heuristic value. Instead I think it is more useful to start the discussion from the point of view of the social division of work. If the assumption should prove to be true, we might ask: why is this differentiation necessary, what distinguishes different groups, what kind of work do they do, and what is the relationship between these segments of the society. One could argue that there is no division of work in pre-state societies, that, at the most, one would find possibly some specialists. But if between 5 and 8% of the population earn their livelihood by other means than the rest, one should at least take the possibility of social division of work into account. Next, we have to discuss how a society provides itself with necessary implements like tools, weapons and objects of daily use. The following four possibilities should be taken into consideration:

- firstly, spare time activities;
- secondly, interethnic trade;
- thirdly, temporarily resident craftsmen and,
- fourthly, full-time specialists.

Categories 2,3 and 4 imply surplus production. Of course, these categories may overlap. Even in industrial Europe and up to the fifties of this century, farmers used to manufacture certain tools with their own hands.

What are the possibilities selected by the people of the Burji-Konso cluster? Are there prerequisites and necessities for a social division of work? Most agricultural societies in Southern Ethiopia are known to have developed sophisticated methods of cultivation, these being particularly elaborate among the member of the Burji-Konso cluster. It is not necessary to describe these methods in detail here. In this respect we are well informed by Kuls and Hallpike with regard to the Konso, and more generally by Straube, Sutton and others. This sophisticated type of agriculture is very work-intensive. Fields not only have to be carefully manured and weeded, but also terraces and irrigation systems must be permanently controlled and repaired. The cultivation of mixed crops and the use of fields at different altitudes

bring about an all-year cycle of work, with only short phases of rest.

Most work is done by working gangs. For a certain period of their lives, each person is a member of such a gang. So in agriculture, distribution of work is regulated according to individual age and sex and is not based on a lifelong connection with specific tasks. In any society, this is only possible as long as the whole of social knowledge, especially about working methods, is common to all individuals and as long as any person may acquire this knowledge from any other person.

On the other hand, common knowledge is not to be expected about activities outside daily practice, and yet these activities are equally necessary, be it for the maintenance of agriculture itself or survival in general. Domestic implements, weaponry, and agricultural tools must be either produced or purchased. If self-produced, special knowledge is required, one has to be familiar with adequate materials and working techniques. Most objects can only be made with the indispensable skill and experience, obtained solely by frequent repetition of the working procedures.

For an individual it is difficult to gain this experience, because those objects are durable and not likely to be made very often during an agricultural season. For certain kinds of work, this may be no handicap. The wood carver, for example, sees directly what he is doing, so he may correct the piece he is working on or transform it into another object. Even if it is totally spoiled, it may still serve as firewood. The case is quite different with working clay or iron. Pottery implies a sequence of partially specialized processes which must be carried out within a given period of time and can not be postponed or reversed at random. To an even greater extent, this holds true for smithing. In addition to the actual hammering, the smith must be in total control - during the whole operation - of the correct temperature for the various sorts of iron and types of work he has to deal with. Forge-welding, as well as hardening the steel, requires special skill and knowledge, perfectly mastered only by a small group of greatly experienced smiths. Accordingly, African smiths are full-time specialists per se. Likewise the working of leather demands great expertise, especially tanning the hides in such a way that they will remain smooth and not decay. Let me comment that we do not know much about this indigenous process of tanning, which sometimes takes more than two weeks. Nonetheless I could prove - against the dominant opinion that there is no such thing as like real tanning in traditional Africa - that this tanning implies a very complex chemical process. What is of special consequence with regard to pottery, smithing and tanning is the fact that they must not be interrupted, except for breaks predetermined by the working procedure. Mistaken interruptions will cause damage. Compare this again to wood carving: an activity which does not need continu-

ous efforts, for a carver can pause as often and as long as he wants. In this respect, you may find a certain similarity in weaving, but with one exception: preparing the warp has to be accomplished within a day to keep the tension even. Thus, in contrast to the above-mentioned crafts, wood carving and weaving are more suitable as spare time occupations.

Now, for intensified cultivation effective and reliable tools are imperative, primarily iron ones. Hoes and other agricultural implements are subject to a high degree of abrasion which is why they must be worked very carefully. And indeed, I have rarely seen such quality. Equally, great importance is laid on durable pots for cooking, fetching water and storing crops etc. And in the highland, warm and durable clothing is needed.

Thus, we have a work-intensive agricultural system demanding a certain minimum of technical equipment in order to maintain production and reproduction, and to satisfy this demand, there are handicrafts which in turn require significant skills. Partition of work into two sections therefore seems reasonable enough. This is made possible on the basis of the production of agricultural surplus. First of all, a surplus is necessary to secure sufficient food stocks for times of drought. Annual rainfall is extremely variable in this region.

One might argue that migrant craftsmen could have stepped in to meet the demand for these necessary products. In other societies, like those of cattleherders, this would make sense, but certainly not within the given system of intensified cultivation and with a population density of 90 per square kilometer. Migrant craftsmen will suffice for pastoralists like the Borona who have no need of durable agricultural implements, but mainly of weapons like knives and spears not subject to rapid wear, but they would not be able to satisfy the high demand within this intensified agriculture.

Being free from farming is essential for smiths. Pottery, on the other hand, is in most African ethnic groups part of the domestic, that is the women's sphere. Now, since men and women of the Burji-Konso cluster are both equally engaged in agriculture, leaving them no time for other occupations, the social division of work here extends to other handicrafts, too. Artisans exclusively living off their work are the smiths, potters tanners and weavers. As a whole they form a separate group which is called ḥawḍo in Dullay, and xawḍa in Konso and Diraša speaking regions. Contrary to the expressions for the mere occupational activities like apa haša, "father of scraping", for the leather-worker, the terms ḥawḍo/xawḍa also have social and ritual connotation. Likewise, the terms for the agricultural population - esakko in Dullay and etanta in Konso - have similar connotations.

The historical development of the social division of work is to be seen as a dialectical process. The specialization of agrarian methods initiated a differentiation of work which

made possible more effective ways of cultivation which, in their turn, set off further divisions of work with the consequence of specific social groups being established. The process continues to this day. In our century, it was influenced mostly from outside; for instance, the number of weavers considerably increased in response to the demand for cotton textiles. The Hawdo had to meet this situation by means of organizational readaptation. But already for pre-Amharic times some changes are reconstructable. In most ethnoi, leather-workers and potters form two separate groups, but in Burji society they are - I think still - combined in such a way that the women are potters and the men leather-workers.

Without the Hawdo (or professional craftsmen) and their products the Esakko (or agriculturists) would be forced to give up intensified cultivation. A case in point are the Tsamako who shifted largely to cattle-breeding.

So we may infer that intensified agriculture and full-time specialization go together. Specialists are no incidental additions, but indispensable to this mode of production. Correspondingly, the following thesis may be formulated: The present cultural situation of these peoples can only be understood if taken as the result of a historical process which includes the intra-societal formation of the division of work. Consequently, the often discussed question whether artisans are foreigners or not becomes secondary. Given the elementary prerequisites of the division of work, residents as well as foreigners may fill these occupations. By the way, the number of immigrants incorporated as farmers exceeds that of immigrant craftsmen by far.

So much for the economy. Now, I come to the social aspects: How do the two groups, Hawdo and Esakko, deal with each other and how do they maintain the distinction between them. According to Marx, the development of productive forces is accompanied by the division of labour and is interdependent with changes of the social order, eventually resulting in antagonistic classes. There are many examples of social development following these lines. In principle, the small communities of craftsmen in traditional African societies are also liable to come under the control of a dominant group or to sink to the level of a marginal group with restricted social and political rights. Within the area under consideration we know of such tendencies from Burji. Occupational craftsmen live by their crafts and not off the land. But they need at least some land for housing which is given to them by farmers who try to exploit this need. Unlike a tenant farmer, however, a craftsman is almost independent of land and through his mobility he is able to largely elude attempts to rob him of his independence. But had mobility been his only liberty it nevertheless could have been taken from him in the course of time. As it is, however, the Hawdo of the Burji-Konso cluster are actually free persons owning their own working equipment and are in command of both the raw materials and the distribution of their product. They are not

subject to any person's orders. At this point, it becomes already clear that the craftsmen's social position cannot be so depressing after all. We have to consider that there are elements preventing a possible social decline of the artisans, elements that have to be shown.

First, let me point out the differences between craftsmen and agriculturists as they manifest themselves in their respective working resources. The craftsman takes the role of a creator, he is not dependent on rain and vegetal growth. This is the reason why artisans are often mythically represented as demiurges. They supply both their own households and those of the farmers. The Hawdo works for the most individually on behalf of the community, while the farmer works largely collectively to meet the needs of his own family. These distinctions are emphasized by endogamy rules and other mutual restrictions. Craftsmen have their own lineages within the clans. On certain occasions, Esakko and Hawdo avoid entering each other's houses and drinking and eating from the same dishes. Normally, craftsmen live together in centres, but these are not exclusively artisan communities. Craftsmen have to procure their own materials and have to sell their products. Accordingly, their occupation also includes trading. Sometimes they are even engaged in long-distance trade. So we have another significant difference: the agriculturists are extremely sedentary whereas the artisans show great mobility.

From differences like these it was deduced that craftsmen are excluded from the main society or set apart or despised and so on. However, grave objections may be brought against this view: most avoidances are mutual. Drinking together from one jug during certain festivities or ceremonies would mean for farmers and potters alike that they would come to harm: the former would get skin disease, the latter would have to reckon with broken pots. Trespassing endogamy rules will have the same results. With regard to the endogamous lineages it is remarkable that the Dullay and some others have traditions which show the first ancestors of craftsmen and farmers to have been created together. The Hawdo is considered the first-born, that is the older brother of the Esakko. In view of a pronounced seniority principle in these societies this is no unimportant aspect. Frequently, Hawdo compounds are described as poor. Combined with their factual or supposed exclusion from landownership, one must get the impression that craftsmen are a subdued minority. But why should an artisan have a large compound with many storehouses, or own many fields? His profession is not the farmer's. If the reputation of an artisan in our own society does not depend on his property in land, why should it be so in Ethiopia? A Konso man made the appropriate comment in response to the German ethnologist Jensen: "The field of the Hawdo is the marketplace."

A criterion for judging the relationship between both groups is their respective participation in public life. Strau-

be reports from Burji that there craftsmen do not take part in the great clan festivities, and Hallpike informs us that the Konso Hawda are excluded from the gada system. These facts must be faced. It is correct that Hawdo frequently do not participate in clan feasts - and this not only in Burji. But let me remark that in most cases these are first-fruit ceremonies. Hallpike, too is right only up to a certain point. In Karatti, where he did most of his fieldwork, craftsmen do not participate in the gada ceremonies and are not allowed to walk on the ceremonial gada place. Most craftsmen there, however, are from Duro, the neighbouring Konso speaking area, and in Duro they do participate - very actively indeed. One of the Hawda leads the candidates for initiation to various ceremonial places and higher ranked smiths from Karatii are commissioned to do the sacrificial slaughters at the climax of the ceremonies. The Hawda and Edanta initiates are treated alike. It stands to reason that no Hawda or Edanta from another region is allowed to enter the confined of the Duro ceremonial ground.

With the Dullay, the direction of the gada ceremonies was exclusively a Hawdo responsibility. Besides the activities known from Duro, here the leading craftsman or haalho piyate turns the first sod when a new gada pole is to be erected. The pole symbolizes the whole group of new initiates. While the pole is erected collectively, the haalho piyate clings to it and is lifted with it, so that he in person symbolizes the whole group. Haalho piyate literally means "master of the land".

Here, we have touched the religious sphere which I, however, do not intend to discuss further. I only want to mention that in Dullay there is no religious ceremony of any communal importance without a Hawdo acting in front. With the neighbouring ethnic groups the craftsmen are mostly engaged in ceremonies concerning the whole country, while the lineage elders are responsible for ancestral duties. The lineage chief of the Esakko or Edanta respectively, by his genealogical link with the first ancestor, represents the static moment of society. It is a common belief that the first ancestor brought with him the first crops. Although the craftsmen share this static element because of their lineage ties, it is more important that with their activities they introduce a special dynamic principle into the society. In the myths, the first Hawdo was a demiurge and his descendants continue to be creative to this day. Through their trade connections they bring society in contact with new and stimulating elements.

We are now in a position to build a model defining the field of relations between minority craftsmen and majority agriculturists. The model refers to the Burji-Konso cluster only, but since, in spite of its cultural peculiarities, this cluster is not at all unique in Southern Ethiopia, we are likely to find similarly structured relationships in other societies, too.

The division of work between two social groups was the prerequisite for cultivators to be able to concentrate their total energies on the agricultural sector. In releasing them from the making of their own implements and supplying them instead with high quality ones, the craftsmen made the intensification of cultivating methods possible. Just as the forms of production and organization separate artisans from agriculturists, so we find this dualism reflected in the endogamy rules. In turn, effected by and eccentuating their supernatural powers, this separation enabled the Hawdo to carry out important socioreligious ceremonies, in particular those maintaining and renewing social peace. As the country's fertility depends of this capacity, the social and religious functions of the craftsmen as well as their material work are directed towards the same purpose: namely, to secure the society's prosperity rooted in agriculture.

On the basis of this dual function, the craftsmen, though significantly different from the agriculturists, are an integral and important part of society. They are by no means a despised group, but a clearly distinctive one.