Résumé
S. Baier — Le commerce à fondement écologique et l'État en Afrique précoloniale.
Commentaire critique des articles de Lovejoy et Roberts publiés dans ce numéro, avec référence aux travaux, français notamment, influencés par le structuralisme et le marxisme.

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Ecologically Based Trade and the State in Precolonial West Africa

The contribution by Paul Lovejoy in this issue presents a survey of the origins and early development of trade from the main zones of production of C. nitida. For the first time economic historians can appreciate how smaller segments of the network of kola production and trade fit into a wider pattern. Richard Roberts, on the other hand, is interested in general analysis, and his extended critical reappraisal of the second chapter of A.G. Hopkins (1973) is followed by his own investigation of the role of States and ecologically based trade in economic growth. Most of my comments are directed to Roberts' work, which I will deal with first.

Hopkins' Economic History of West Africa has made a lasting impression and merits continued discussion in light of the new scholarship that has come on the scene, some of it in response to issues he raised. One area of new work is Roberts' own very stimulating research on the Middle Niger valley (1980a; 1980b).

While Roberts also has much to contribute to theoretical analysis, some of the detail of his argument will provoke controversy. For example, it is questionable to say that Hopkins conceives of the market in spatial terms, since this is only one element in the definition Roberts quotes; Hopkins is concerned with economic aggregates, and in particular the aggregate production function as determined by the decisions of individual households to produce for subsistence and marketed output. Furthermore, it is unfair to Hopkins to dismiss his argument as tautological. For Hopkins, the market is the source of growth and change, and limits on the growth of the market stem from the sparseness of population and the high cost of transportation. Hopkins therefore uses population/land ratios and the level of technology as explanatory factors. Of course taking these as independent variables is not fully satisfying because they may be interrelated, and they are not related in simple ways to other factors, including the supposedly dependent variables. Hopkins never meant to imply this kind of causation, but rather to provide a general introduction to the precolonial economy in a book mainly concerned with the period after 1800.

Cahiers d'Études africaines, 77-78, XX-1-2, pp. 149-154.
Roberts proceeds to his own analysis and the observation that the forward and backward linkages of ecologically based long-distance trade were minimal, which makes sense; but the implicit comparison is to manufacturing or processing, which begs the question of economic growth in a pre-industrial setting. The argument that ecologically based trade in a commodity is accompanied by low prices within the region for this commodity is sound. Roberts says that these low prices for output discourage occupational specialization, meaning further specialization, as opposed to specialization in the main ecologically determined export. This occupational specialization would have to be in local manufacturing of items such as textiles or leather goods. In the Central Sudan these were dry-season occupations of farmers and herders, and full-time occupations of specialists in cities such as Kano. It is not clear what would have resulted from higher incomes, greater aggregate demand for these manufactured items, and larger numbers of full-time specialists: dramatic changes in productivity or technological change? As Shea (1975) has pointed out, technological change in cloth dyeing did occur in Kano, but its effects in terms of reducing the overall costs of production were not great.

A series of interesting issues arise in the last section of the paper, where Roberts attempts to work out an alternative to Hopkins’ approach and seeks ‘a sufficient motor for pre-industrial production and trade’. He states that the answer is to be found in political economy, and from what follows it appears that his principal interest is the economic role of the military and other ruling classes of the State in promoting long-distance trade. The example presented is the Segu Bambara State, which provided security for expanded production; an aggressive army that captured slaves; a progressive commercial policy; and sources of demand to allow occupational specialization. Income from this specialized production permitted expanded ecologically based trade. When the State was attacked during the Umarian conquest of 1860-63, several of the top stories fell from this economic house of cards, and subsistence production regained the foreground.

The argument is, in short, that the State was the ‘motor’ for economic growth and change. But what was the motor of the State? In other words, what was the economic basis of the State, and how did the State affect or manipulate this base with commercial or other economic policy? Hopkins asked the last of these questions in his reply to Dalton (Hopkins 1976), and it is very close to the question asked by those interested in defining and analyzing modes of production. The Marxist literature on precolonial Africa is indeed instructive. One of the few safe conclusions that can be drawn in surveying this literature and other empirical research to which it refers is that most precolonial African States were not characterized by a single form of appropriation of surplus. It is of course possible to construct arguments about the dominance of one or the other forms of extraction of surplus, as follows:
Warfare and its by-product of enslavement. Slaves may either be sold or used to reproduce the existing warrior or exploited class (Roberts 1980c; Latour Dejean 1980).

Extraction of surplus from agriculture or other activities relying on the collection of tribute from kinship based units primarily engaged in providing their own subsistence (Suret-Canale 1964).

The exploitation of slave labor, a case argued by Terray (1974) for Gyaman but refuted by Dumett (1979).

The control and taxation of long-distance trade (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1969).

While readers may agree that in a particular State one or the other of these forms is dominant, it is likely that other forms will be present as well. The difficulty of viewing the State as a motor of growth and change is that at least several aspects of the activities of the ruling classes of the State might allow growth. A further problem arises in discussing the nature of relationships between various forms of appropriation of surplus. In the case of the Segu Bambara State, for example, it might be argued that a strong agricultural base was ultimately the motor, as it supported ruling classes and was accompanied by strong desert-side links (which the State might choose to tax); it also permitted a strong military, which, in turn, enlarged the agricultural base by bringing additional land and more slaves into the State. This additional agricultural surplus encouraged additional ecologically based trade and permitted expansion of the military, etc. This model cannot be taken seriously, but it is meant to show that changes in the economic foundations of a given State were interrelated, and that taking military success and progressive commercial policies as a starting point is little more satisfying than talking about constraints on demand because of sparse population and inefficient transportation. Military success and commercial policy are not the only possible starting points, and they are intertwined with other aspects of the economic basis of the State and other forms of policy.

There is, of course, a problem of evidence. The work of Paul Lovejoy (1974; 1979; Lovejoy & Baier 1975) and others (Baier 1980a; 1980b; Last 1967; Nicolas 1975; Smaldone 1977) on the 19th-century Central Sudan provides us with about as much detail on a precolonial economic region as is likely to be available anywhere. We can follow the growth of the caliphate economy in the 19th century, but it is still not possible to determine which aspects of the economic basis of the State or of its economic policy acted as a ‘motor’. We can argue that we know more than that the following conditions or processes were simultaneous: favourable climate, internal security, military success on the borders, enslavement and relocation of population to the central regions, increased output from manufacturing, thriving ecologically founded trade, stronger central government within emirates patterned on an Islamic model, and trans-Saharan or Atlantic exports grafted onto the top of the edifice.
But given the nature of the evidence we have, we are not on solid ground when discussing causation.

In fairness to Hopkins it should be pointed out that the call for emphasis on production rather than trade is both old (Alpers 1973) and widespread (Copans 1980). Furthermore Hopkins' work was not that of a pure formalist. As he points out in his reply to Dalton, he stressed the existence of powerful forces toward self-sufficiency in discussing limits on economic growth. Hopkins' emphasis on the market as an indicator of growth or change, when and where such a change took place, worked well as a thematic device and accurately reflected the available historical sources.

The usefulness of continuing to refer to formalist and substantivist positions is doubtful, especially when it is implied that either one remains intact. We have case studies of market and non-market relations co-existing. There are many documented cases of obligatory payments existing alongside markets. In the desert-side regions, for example, even slaves, whose output was mostly given to obligatory payments, might have private earnings from long-distance trade (Baier & Lovejoy 1977). In addition, detailed case studies describe non-market sources of commercial or agricultural capital or labor in households producing substantial marketed surplus (Berry 1975) or wholly involved in market activities (Baier 1980a; 1980b). The substantivist position, as originally formulated, has not held up either. It has nevertheless led to some extremely stimulating work, notably that of Meillassoux (1960; 1972), although Meillassoux's main sources of influence are structuralism and Marxist analysis.

Paul Lovejoy's article is a comprehensive and thought-provoking survey of early kola production and trade which accomplishes and surpasses the goals stated in the first section. He provides well-supported hypotheses for the origins and spread of *C. nitida* production, a brief description of the organization of production in each of the three early producing areas, and an outline sketch of the small-scale overseas exports of kola. As in the case of other overseas commodity exports, African capital was prominent; but in the case of kola, it was virtually the only source of capital. He notes the ethnic differences between producers and traders of kola. He calls attention to the presence of States north of the savanna/forest ecological boundary and their absence to the south in the kola producing areas, except for that under Asante control. Asante also controlled the mining and trade of gold, and it exported slaves.

The absence of States in two of the early kola producing zones would seem to create difficulties for Roberts' position, but Lovejoy's presentation makes it clear that in Asante ecologically specialized production, trade in gold and slaves, and economic growth were intertwined. Roberts' analysis cannot clarify the exact nature of the relations between them, yet it has a certain appeal when applied to the grain producing areas in
the Senegal valley, the Middle Niger valley, and the Central Sudan, where States controlled agricultural production as well as trade based on ecologically specialized production from the desert and from the forest.

Both articles deserve the attention of scholars and continued discussion.

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