

DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN ADMINISTRATION: PRE-COLONIAL TIMES AND SINCE

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Summary

Historical accounts of African public administration often highlight the colonial setting and usually overlook pre-colonial Africa. The African civil service has its roots in pre-colonial institutions on which European powers relied to build the colonial state and consolidate their administration. Thus, this chapter analyzes the development of African administration from the pre-colonial era up to the present. The first section discusses the pre-colonial period. The colonial system constitutes the second section. The third section deals with the post-colonial period and discusses some problems associated with African administration.

1. The Pre-Colonial Period: From the Ashes of Pharaohs to the Berlin Conference

At the end of the prehistoric period (10 000 BC), some African nomadic bands began to settle more permanently in villages along the Nile River to develop the political foundation of ancient Egypt. As these early farmers increased their mastery over soil and animal life, irrigation became a key development strategy to increase food production, which in turn multiplied their populations. Eventually, different villages came to recognize their common interests, to coordinate their efforts and broaden community linkages. People from different communities joined together through confederation or conquest for purposes of commerce or defense, and developed African

empires, kingdoms, and chieftaincies. Two types of systems, hierarchical political systems and horizontal or acephalous societies, developed to help generate stable communities and foster prosperity.

Stateless societies were small political entities and had no bureaucracies as they were mostly based on kinship. Hierarchical societies, however, had bureaucracies to carry out certain functions such as collecting taxes, supervising ceremonies, entertaining dignitaries, and compelling people to do the rulers' bidding. These polities, which evolved before the arrival of Europeans in Africa, were either centralized or decentralized political entities presided over by emperors, kings, chiefs, or military commanders. The following analysis covers the first hierarchical form of rule that emerged some three millennia BC in ancient Egypt, followed by a brief overview of Medieval Africa. The final sub-section discusses the African administration up to the Berlin Conference in 1884-1885.

1.1. Ancient Civilization of Africa: The Case of Egypt

Around 3300 BC, farming lineages along the Nile Valley joined together as villages to increase production of food and to defend themselves against outsiders. From these villages regional confederations of Upper and Lower Egypt developed. By 3100 BC, a central authority emerged and unified these confederations under the rule of divine pharaohs. From 2700 to 2181, six dynasties succeeded each other to form the Old Kingdom. A century and a half of civil war and provincial rivalries gave rise to the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdoms that ruled Egypt from 2080 to 1640 BC. The Middle Kingdom was replaced by the Second Intermediate Period and the New Kingdom from 1570 to 1090 BC. Three dynasties (18th through 20th) ruled in the New Kingdom and the Third Intermediate Period began around 1089 BC with the Kushite Kings.

The Egyptian empire was multinational consequent to the conquest of foreign nations. The Old and Middle Kingdoms were highly centralized and ruled by "god-kings" or pharaohs. With its capital at Memphis, the Old Kingdom was divided into provinces. Next to the king was the *vizier*, the administrative hand of the king, who was also in charge of day to day administrative, fiscal, and judicial matters. Although very few administrative documents have survived, court documents provide a glimpse of the Egyptian bureaucracy. Three basic administrative divisions existed: the Department of the Head of the South, the Office of Government Labor, and the Treasury.

The Palermo Stone provides further evidence of administrative structure in the collection of revenue and in the assessment of Egyptian wealth. On the Stone was documented a biennial administrative census that left nothing unaccounted for, so that taxes could be assessed even on the basis of canals, lakes, wells, and trees of an estate. The system consisted of a hierarchical structure with diverse administrative agencies spreading throughout the kingdom for effective management. Another governmental task was the administration of justice, on which was founded the concept of *ma'at* (or justice), whereby some high priests bore the title of priest of *Ma'at*.

In addition to the capital city of Memphis, there were other towns of importance that

made up provinces headed by town governors, who were also chief priests in charge of temple revenue in many parts of Ancient Egypt. Provincial temples were the subject of central government regulations to avoid any strong power at the provincial level. However, during the first intermediate period, the office of governor in charge of civil affairs became the office of chief priest.

The role of bureaucracy in these early kingdoms was to facilitate the transfer of resources from different provinces to the king's court. If early administrations were in charge of maintaining irrigation and agricultural output, later administrations seemed to be more involved in supervising construction work and wealth transfer. The proliferation of these later types of bureaucracies, at the expense of those that used to maintain the agricultural system, would probably have produced pressures on the agricultural output and might have been the first sign of political decay in Ancient Egypt. The centralized system itself between the king, court officers, and ambitious governors may also have led to the same result.

The New Kingdom and the Third Intermediate Period generated a great mass of documentation about Egyptian political and administrative life. The form of government remained the same, based on divine kingship. The government always stressed the religious function of the political system. Under the auspices of Gods, the government was expected to maintain the integrity of Egyptian territory and expand its frontiers. The most important function of the government was to create civic and individual security, and the vizier carried out the duty of ensuring that law and regulations were obeyed throughout the bureaucracy. The society was divided into hierarchical stratifications with the king at the top, a small group of high-ranking and wealthy officials next, and a much larger group of bureaucrats (scribes), priests, soldiers, stable masters, citizens, cultivators, and herdsmen filling the bottom layer.

The Egyptian political system under the New Kingdom and the Third Intermediate Period was divided into an internal government and a government of conquests. Internally, the civil government was run by two viziers (northern and southern), overseer of the granaries of upper and lower Egypt, and the chief taxing master. The two viziers also supervised the overseer of the treasury and lower level officials in charge of bureaucracy, judiciary, and the police. At the lowest level of the administrative hierarchy were the chiefs, town mayors, and councils. The government of conquests had several governors who supervised vassal kings and their battalion commanders. Most of the Northern Lands were small and scattered, and under the direct control of various battalion commanders. The goal of this decentralization scheme was to obstruct anyone from controlling a large estate and challenging the king's power. The governor of the Southern Lands was the Viceroy of Kush and his role became important internally at the end of the Twentieth Dynasty. He also supervised two deputies and a battalion commander. Military forces were all centralized under one commander. In addition to these administrative entities, there existed a religious government hierarchy, with the "overseer of prophets" at the top, a position held at various times by a vizier who was the head of two high priests. Below them was the priesthood bureaucracy.

The corps of the centralized system was maintained by a small group of powerful officials. They headed each department and reported directly to the king who appointed

and removed them. The bureaucracy consisted of a group of educated scribes whose role consisted of collecting taxes, conducting censuses, regulating agriculture, and administering justice and law with a small police force. A professional army was divided into various units, each with its own hierarchy of officers.

Pressures on land and rising inflation may have been politically significant in later days of the New Kingdom, though bureaucratic inefficiency and abuse of power were probably the main causes of economic collapse. Besides the deterioration of administrative integrity, another major cause that weakened the kingship was the changing relationship between the king, civil government, army, and a few powerful families. Some families came to control major economic resources of the state, and the civil service became less susceptible to royal control. In addition, the kings' tours of their provinces became less frequent, and royal princes and other deputies carried out religious rites formerly performed by the kings. During the ensuing Third Intermediate Period (1069 - 664 BC), Egypt was in perpetual crisis and the Egyptian civilization disappeared after the Roman conquest around 30 BC. In summary, the evolution of Ancient Egypt is characterized by the rise and fall of large scale governments that reflect alternating periods of unification and fragmentation.

1.2. Medieval Africa

Medieval Africa was different from the Ancient in several respects. First, Medieval leaders attempted to balance local traditions and regional autonomy in response to their people's needs by developing and consolidating large-scale kingdoms and empires for purposes of trade or defense. A second difference was the impact of Islam on African societies. Muslims believed that one God (Allah) called on them to undertake *jihads* (commonly known as holy war against non-believers) when necessary. The most renowned of Africa's medieval empires of Mali, Songhay and Morocco rose to the highest stages of their international influence with Islam as the imperial religion. Other medieval African kingdoms and empires developed indigenous political ideologies based on regional customs and beliefs, while Coptic Christianity remained the official state religion in the Abyssinian kingdom of medieval Ethiopia.

In 969 A.D., Muslims from the Maghreb conquered Egypt and established the Fatimid Dynasty in Cairo (c. 970-1170 A.D.), which was highly hierarchical and whose military was highly professionalized. This strict hierarchy of officials, and the controlling powers of the vizier, left room neither for the autonomous tendencies of provincial governors nor for the growth of widespread corruption. Tolerant of other religions, the system let Copts and Jews occupy prestigious positions in the administration. The centralized administration controlled tax revenues, the payment of troops, and the allocation of military fiefs. The Fatimid administration was in charge of regulating and distributing the waters of the Nile River. Dams and canals were regularly repaired and improved; even an occasional period of low water did not greatly damage the general economic situation.

When the Fatimid rule in Egypt was threatened by European Christian Crusaders (c. 1170), it was Egypt's professional soldiers, or *Mamluks* (slave-soldier), who rallied behind Saladin to defeat the Crusaders. He then established a new *Mamluk* Dynasty in

Cairo from 1171 to 1517. By the thirteenth century, the institution of the slave-soldiers became an integral part of the political and social system in many Muslim countries. The *Mamluk* oligarchy never accepted in its ranks someone who was not a slave soldier, so that the military establishment not only remained hierarchical, but also continued to be a caste dominated by slave soldiers.

Most *Mamluk* caliphates were divided into military fiefs centralized under one single Caliph. The basic administrative entity was the village because the *Mamluk* dynasty obtained most of its revenues from landed estates. A major innovation to ensure payment was that the peasants were prohibited from leaving their villages without permission. In addition to land taxes, the *Mamluk* caliphates drew their revenues from customs duties, based on *ad valorem* and the religion of the merchants, so that Christian importers had to pay taxes as high as 30%, whereas Muslim importers paid only 10%. This canonical tax was abolished under the reform of 1316.

Several other kingdoms, such as Ghana and Mali, developed in Medieval Western Sudan. But the best known was the Kingdom of Songhay founded around the trading town of Gao (c. 1000 A.D.). The Songhay Kingdom broke away from Mali and subsequently arose to become the third great empire in the medieval western Sudan (c. 1460-1590). Songhay's founding emperor, Sunni Ali, established imperial authority northward into the Sahara in order to control international trade routes and valuable deposits of rock salt (which was mined and cut into large blocks to be traded for gold). Following Ali's death, one of his generals, Muhammad Toure, overthrew the legitimate heir, and embarked on a *haji* to Mecca. In 1496 he returned to wage *jihad* against non-Muslims. He conquered new territories and ruled over Songhay's expanded empire as Caliph of West Africa. Under Muhammad's authority (1493-1528), Songhay, especially the towns of Timbuktu and Jenne, rose to become one of the medieval world's largest multinational empires. The administrative system was open enough to provide lower level citizens some type of upward social mobility.

The empire was highly decentralized and Islam was used as a tool to assimilate different communities. Different categories of slaves cultivated fields, constructed adobe buildings and mosques, acted as porters, or served as soldiers and officials in the imperial government. Some of the latter rose through government and military bureaucracies by virtue of meritorious work to achieve high positions of administrative responsibility, as did soldier Muhammad Toure, when he rose by military merit to become a general and then became the emperor of Songhay. As emperor of Songhay, Muhammad established effective central supervision over provincial governors. He also reformed Songhay's imperial government so that merit (rather than birth) became the principal criterion for advancement in bureaucracy. Eventually, after Muhammad became blind and was deposed in 1528, Songhay's trans-Saharan trade declined. This was also partly due to competition from European sea traders along the West African Atlantic coast, which undercut the trans-Saharan gold trade. After severe political crises of succession disputes, rebellions and civil war that Songhay emperors faced during the 1580s, their imperial army was decisively defeated by Morocco's elite musketeers at the Battle of Tondibi in 1591.

Other kingdoms and chieftaincies came up throughout Central, Eastern and Southern

Africa. Although some of these polities were decentralized or confederated, most of them developed as centralized systems where the king or the chief represented the top, followed by the house of the king or an inner circle of advisors, and finally the Council of Elders as the legislative branch. The army and bureaucrats were in charge of maintaining security and law, collecting taxes, and conducting censuses. In most polities, age was a major social feature of stratification, while in other areas the system was meritocratic.

1.3. Beyond the Medieval Era to the Nineteenth Century

In the late 1500s and through the 1700s, Europeans and Arabs introduced new weapons and made new demands for captives of war throughout Africa to meet the demands of a growing international slave trade. Consequently, many of Africa's previous patterns of political and economic growth were disrupted, even though many of the great traditions of medieval African politics and administration continued to guide their evolution. As African kingdoms and empires continued to develop, and trade between coastal cities and interior regions expanded throughout the continent, various African peoples established political confederations based on religious ideology, commercial linkages and/or military authority. Such confederations were committed to establishing broader nationalist ideologies, promoting literacy and advancement by merit, expanding both regional and international commerce, and undertaking significant administrative and military reforms.

The first great reformer and leader in North Africa was an Ottoman military commander, Muhammad Ali (1805-1848). He established the first secular schools, engineering and medical colleges, modern factories, modern printing presses, and state-owned textile and munitions factories. His successors continued his policies of borrowing foreign capital and building projects, such as the Suez Canal that was completed in 1869.

In the west, the original Asante confederation, established by seven clans near the city of Kumasi (in modern day Ghana), united around the symbolic Golden Stool of their ruler Asante-Hene. This confederation built roads and promoted agriculture, commerce, industry and education through self-help and self-reliance. The Asante emperors implemented several modernization policies in administration that included promoting advancement by merit and the development of state enterprise through public investment. By 1874, the British imperial army defeated the Asante army and annexed the Fante territories into their Gold Coast colony.

In East Africa (c. 1800-1885), there was also a movement toward centralization of authority and broadened commercial linkages throughout the region, from Ethiopia's Highlands to the Limpopo River in Southern Africa. In the first half of the nineteenth century, however, Africa continued to be significantly disrupted by international trade in slaves, even as new Euro-American markets began to demand large imports of such African-based commodities as palm oil, cotton, peanuts, and ivory. By mid-century, European merchants realized that Africans could produce such valuable exports more efficiently and humanely by working in their own countries than by working as slaves in the Americas. Many other nineteenth century African nations were consciously modernizing their various political economies and shifting to regional confederacies,

centralized national confederations and written constitutions, until such indigenous modernizing tendencies were interrupted by European colonial conquests.

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Biographical Sketch

Emizet F. Kisangani is Associate Professor of Political Science at Kansas State University. He received his MA degree in Economics and Political Science at the University of Oregon and his Ph.D. in Political Science at the University of Iowa. His research involves state-building in Africa and quantitative analysis of military intervention. He is the author of several book chapters and a monograph entitled *Zaire after Mobutu: A Case of a Humanitarian Emergency* (Helsinki: UN/WIDER 1997). His articles have appeared in *African Studies Review*, *Armed Forces & Society*, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *International Journal of World Peace*, *International Studies Quarterly* and other political science journals.