CHAPTER TWO

THE PROBLEM

The Problem Stated

The problem concerns, essentially, the working of a hagiarchy, 'government'—if this is not too strong a term—by hereditary saints in a near anarchic tribal environment.

The area surrounding Ahansal displays a number of interesting features: a strong religious influence in political matters, and apparently a stable one. On the other hand, it does not manifest those regular moieties which have been claimed to be the characteristic features of Berber political life.

To what extent may one speak of a 'maraboutic state',¹ a dynasty, an hagiarchy? Or, to put it the other way, how is an anarchic State of Nature mitigated by hereditary saints?

In brief—how did the Rule of Saints, or Anarchy Mitigated by Holiness, maintain itself and function?

Segmentation and Ancestors

The Berbers of the Central High Atlas, like all other Moroccan and indeed Maghrebin tribes, are a segmentary patrilineal people.

¹The term 'marabout' has become an adopted French word. (The local Berber word is aguerras.) For instance: 'Ainsi associés aux républiques indépendantes les marabouts participent souvent de leur étonnante stabilité et de la force qu'y conservent les traditions. Certaines dynasties religieuses—celles des Ahansal, que les tribus basses font remonter au XIIIe siècle... paraissent ainsi à conserver le pouvoir plus longtemps que les chers maîtres de l'Empire'.

It should be noted that this passage appeared in a book published three years before the final conquest of the dissident two thirds of the 'dynasty' of Ahansal, and of Zawiya Ahansal itself, and of the major part of Ahansal-land.
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The general nature and functioning of segmentary societies is a familiar and well explored theme in social anthropology. To some extent, accounts applicable to similar societies elsewhere are valid here. Hence one must restate the general features of segmentation for the sake of the completeness of the account, familiar though these features are to anthropologists.

The affiliation of a Berber to a social group is generally expressed in terms of his alleged patrilineal descent. Most of the rights and duties allocated to him are such in virtue of his male ancestors in the male line. Social groups in Berber society generally have the name Ait X. X is usually, but not always, the name of a person, such as Brahim or Mhand. In principle, a man is a member of a group Ait X in virtue of being a descendant of X. ‘Ait’ can however also be combined with a place name, to designate the inhabitants of the place: for instance, Ait Talmest, the people of Talmest.

A man’s name generally consists of three linked parts: first, his own proper name, second, his father’s name, and third a name indicating the immediately larger group which will often also be the name of a recent ancestor, possibly his grandfather. The name of the woman has a similar structure and does not change on marriage: apart from her personal name, it will include her father’s name and his immediate group. In daily life, the names are of course often abbreviated by omitting the last or the last two constituents.

One should perhaps stress the general point that the notion of ‘a man’s name’ is ambiguous. We tend to forget this: passports and other identity documents and legal conventions of our society unconsciously turn us into Platonists of a kind, wedded to the supposition that there is some one sound or group of sounds which ‘is’ a man’s real name. In fact of course this is not so, and names like other things depend on context. If we define his ‘name’ as the term by means of which he is identified or to which he will respond if called, the ‘name’ will vary according to the situation, and the crucial thing in the context will be the implied contrast. In the context of his immediate family, his first name will be sufficient. In the village, his first name conjoined with his father’s name will be adequate. In the context of a wider tribal assembly or a market, a fuller name which refers also to his clan may be required. If his clan in the narrower sense is a prominent and well-known one, then the ‘narrower’ clan name may be used. If on the other hand

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his immediate clan is obscure, and the use of the wider clan name does not lead to ambiguity, then the wider term may be invoked. Identity cards and their implication of a unique name for all contexts only came in to the Atlas during the French Protectorate. Although the possession of an identity card was essential for purposes of travel, it did not effect the way in which tribesmen saw their names. The habit of inventing family names in the European style is almost unknown, and occurs only in the cases of permanent migration to a town or in the very rare cases of the possession of a modern education.

Nevertheless, allowing for the context-bound nature of the traditional names, one might say that roughly speaking a man’s name consists of three parts, and that the relationship of these three parts is governed by certain loose principles.

For instance, a man’s name might be Daud u Said n’ait Yussif, David son of Said of the people of Yussif. Ideally, Yussif would be the name of his grandfather, and the Ait Yussif, the people Yussif, would cover all other families descended from the same grandfather. In fact, various adjustments may take place: Yussif may have had no sons other than Said, the Ait Yussif thus being co-extensive with the Ait Said, and there is little point in dwelling on the grandfather’s name; but there may be some point in stressing the little-clan affiliation inside the village, Daud’s clan being (say one of the three in the village) the Ait Ahmad. He may then describe himself as Daud u Said n’ait Ahmad. Other adjustments of such kinds occur.

In daily intercourse, a man may be called by his own name, or that in conjunction with his father’s or in conjunction with the clan’s name, or by his father’s name alone (prefixed by ‘u’), or by an accepted nickname.

Daud’s sister Tuda would describe herself as Tuda Said n’ait Yussif (or n’ait Ahmad), or might in imitation of Arab ways describe herself as Tuda bint Said etc. Her name does not change on marriage.

Feminine names seldom appear ‘higher up’ in the name, so to speak, though occasionally they do. A slave, particularly a female one, may be identified by her mother rather than her father, e.g., Fatma n’Zida, Fatma of Zida’s; or parallel clans, claiming descent from the same ancestor, may name themselves not after the sons of the shared ancestor, but after his respective wives, who are alleged
to have given birth to the sons fathering the segments, as for instance Ait Sfia, Ait Ash'sha in Zawiya Ahansal.

The basic feature of the local law of inheritance is that brothers inherit equally. The whole system is symmetrical as between brothers.

Social groups are strongly endogamous. The preferred form of marriage is to the patri-lateral parallel cousin, to the father's brother's daughter. This preference is expressed negatively, as the right of all male parallel cousins, including more distant ones, to object to and prevent a marriage of a girl to someone outside the agnostic group. The suitor from outside the group has to obtain the consent of the male patri-lateral cousins of his would-be-bride before he can marry her. The concept of father's brother (ami) is used in a semi-classifying way, as is son-of-father's brother (yus n'ami): on examination, it often turns out that the 'uncle' or 'cousin', in this sense, is further 'away' than the narrowest interpretation of the terms would suggest.

In order to conceptualise and express the segmentary patrilineal organisation of their society, Berbers do not generally draw diagrams. The situation is expressed and described genealogically. The most standard kind of Berber genealogy is as it were Occamist: Ancestors are not multiplied beyond necessity. The individual knows the name of his father and of his grandfather: after that, he will name or know of only those ancestors who perform the useful task of defining an effective social group. Ancestors who do not earn their keep by performing this task are not worth the wear of remembering (or inventing).

It is a commonplace of the treatment of such genealogies that they cannot be taken at their face value. For one thing, and the most obvious one, the remembered ancestors are simply too few: if one believed these genealogies, one would have to assume a most phenomenal growth of population over the recent centuries, and imagine the Atlas, not so very many years ago, inhabited by a very small number of extremely virile old men, ancestors of virtually the whole of the present population. But genealogies of this kind are inaccurate not merely through their omissions, through the 'forgetting' of all socially redundant ancestors. It would be equally rash to assume that the remembered ancestors are survivors from genuinely real lines of descent, islands of true memory sticking out of a sea of oblivion. The islands themselves may be spurious. To realise this, one needs only reflect that the existing social groups generally need an ancestor as a kind of conceptual apex: an ancestor, however real, does not need a social group. He is indeed past needing anything, and not in a position of bringing it into being if he wished. The presently existing social group on the other hand is in a position to satisfy its need for a concept which it requires to express its very existence (leaving aside the need, suggested by anthropological theory, of reinforcing its solidarity).

The most typical Berber genealogy, the Occamist one or an approximation thereof, with a remembered father and grandfather, and thereafter only ancestors who in fact define existing groupings, is however but one form a genealogy may take, though the most common and basic type. Two factors above all may lead to a modification to this type of genealogy: extreme sedentarisation and sanctity.

Very sedentarised tribes, i.e., those in whose lives agriculture (with irrigated and hence immobile fields) plays a far larger part than pastoralism, may dispense with genealogical definitions of the larger, higher level social groupings. In their case, the wider and more general groups may be defined geographically. There may be, at the top, levels of segmentation where the word Ait is followed...
not by a personal name but by a place name. The genealogical conceptualisation of groups only comes in at the lower levels. Within the region I am concerned with, there is one tribe where this has unambiguously happened. It is worth noting that the situation seems similar in the western High Atlas, where most or all tribes are very sedentarised.¹ All this however, does not disturb the tree-like neatness of the segmentary system, though it does conflict with some widely accepted theories about Berber mentality.⁸

The manner in which sanctity affects genealogies is far more important for our purposes. Saints do not have Occamist genealogies. On the contrary, they have Veblen-esque ones, indulging in a kind of conspicuous display of genealogical wealth. The more ancestors the merrier, and certainly the better. A typical successful saint will possess a genealogy which contains a long string of names of whom only a few have the role of defining existing corporate groups, by standing at the apex of their genealogy; and indeed only few have any kind of image or personality attached to their name. (In the case of the Occamist ancestors of lay tribes’ segments, an image may also be lacking – but such a faceless ancestor defines a group instead.) Such ancestors, faceless and groupless, simply add to the richness of the ancestral line.

²A ce sujet, le lecteur, peu familiarisé avec les façons de penser arabes, doit se préparer fortement de cette idée, qu’Arabes et Barbères ont une conception "biologique", non territoriale de la patrie; ils ne disent pas "Je suis de ce village", mais "J’appartiens à cette tribu". (Récemment, nous avons en main un livre sur le préhistoire en Angleterre; il s’intitule: The earliest Englishmen; qu’il dit que l’Angleterre, avant l’arrivée des Anglais, est un point de vue qui échappait à nos indigènes?) (G.H. Bouquet, Les Barbères, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1957), p. 52.

In general this is true, but exceptions exist, notably amongst well-sedentarised groups. Consider the following quotations from Prof. Jacques Berque’s Structures Sociales du Haut-Atlas, (Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1955), p. 63.

Montagnards, Sédentaires.

... Or le premier résultat de l’analyse est qu’ils sont des immigrés, et que, fait plus instructif, ils n’ont aucune gêne à avouer une origine étrangère. Ils y mettent même... quelque commodité... On sent que leur sobriété n’est pas de revendiquer une ascendance arabe ou chrétienne. Il est de subir ensemble, alors qu’on vient de si loin... On ne pose pas au beau milieu d’Orient, mais plutôt à l’autre bout petit berger qui s’entasse à sa juste place.

A similar description would apply to the important highly sedentarised tribe of Bu Gmea in the central High Atlas, and possibly to some others, though not to the four really large groupings which make up most of the clients of the saints of this study.

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DIVIDE THAT YE NEED NOT BE RULED

A schematic representation, (page 39), of a simplified segmentary society. Diagram A displays its appearance from the viewpoint of any one individual; Diagram B displays its structure from the viewpoint of the group as a whole. If (a) only one sex is allowed to be significant in ancestry, and (b) only shared ancestry is allowed to define groups, and (c) the whole group (‘tribe’) shares one ultimate ancestor, it follows that the individual is a member only of a series of ‘nested’ groups, the largest defined by the most distant ancestor (and so on downwards), with no groups of which he is member cutting across each other. From the viewpoint of the total group, what follows is that, at each level of size, there are groups opposing, ‘balancing’ each other. (For the sake of completeness of argument, I am spelling out points which are trivial to anthropologists. The main argument will be concerned not with such a neat scheme, but the complications introduced in it by the saintly system.)

Divide That Ye Need Not Be Ruled. (The Concept of Segmentation)

Berbers of the Atlas are segmentary and patrilineal. There are important differences between the segmentation of holy and of lay groups, and minor differences within each of the two general classes.

The notion of segmentation, as developed by modern social anthropology, above all by Professor E.E. Evans-Pritchard, is simple, applies in various degrees to very many tribal societies, and is extremely illuminating. It deserves to be more widely known outside the anthropological community. It throws a very great deal of light on the problem of how order is maintained in societies – both in societies in which the segmentary principle is the most important factor in maintaining order, and for societies in which it is merely subsidiary.

The notion of a segmentary society comprises several connected elements:

1. It contains a theory of social cohesion, a theory which describes an improvement on the maxim ‘divide and rule’. The Roman maxim recommends a technique for facilitating government. Segmentary societies employ the same technique for doing without government altogether: divide that ye need not be ruled.

The idea underlying the theory is that the functions of maintaining cohesion, social control, some degree of ‘law and order’, which otherwise depend largely on specialised agencies with sanctions at
their disposal, can be performed with tolerable efficiency, simply by the 'balancing' and 'opposition' of constituent groups. Cohesion is maintained not by agencies of coercion at home, but by a threat from outside; and hence at every level of size for which there is an 'at home', there must be a corresponding 'outside'. There is of course nothing at all remarkable about the employment of this principle: it is well known in all contexts that cohesion and cooperation can often best be secured through a threat from a common enemy. It is easy to observe the operation of this principle in our own society, which is by no means segmentary. What defines a segmentary society is not that this does occur, but that this is very nearly all that occurs.

The possibility of achieving so much by so simple a device depends on other features of segmentary society:

(2) A 'tree-like' structure: groups to which a person can belong are arranged in a system such that, starting from the largest group, there is within it a set of mutually exclusive sub-groups, and each of these similarly has a set of sub-subgroups, and so on, until one arrives at the ultimate atoms, be they individuals or families.

Again, what defines a segmentary society is not that a system of groups satisfying these conditions can be found within it, but that only such a system (or very nearly) can be found within it.

The consequences of this are obvious and striking: from the viewpoint of any group, its composition can be specified without ambiguity, and without any danger of using criteria of membership which might cut across each other.

A group is sub-divided into sub-groups: they in turn sub-divide, and so forth. This principle of division and sub-division generates all the groupings which are to be found in the society. In other words, there are no cross-cutting groups and criteria. In a non-segmentary society, clubs, sects, associations, guilds, age-sets, secret societies and so forth may cut across the clan divisions and sub-divisions. The cross cutting of ties itself constitutes an interesting principle of the maintenance of social order – but this is another and not a segmentary principle. A segmentary society is defined by the absence, or by the approximation of absence, of such other ties. In an ideally pure segmentary society, they would be totally absent. In the actual societies known as segmentary, these cross-cutting ties are at least relatively unimportant, and the next divisions and sub-divisions on the one 'tree' are very important.

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**Divide that Ye Need Not Be Ruled**

The social universe in such a segmentary society consists of groups always definable in the logically simplest and nearest way, by genus and differentia, by specifying the next higher-level group (genus) and the principle separating the sub-group-to-be-defined from the others within it (differentia). Where the segmentation is genealogical, one ancestor provides the genus, another one, often his alleged son, the differentia. Such a social world is of course very different from those numerous other universes, social or other, in which principles of sub-division untidily cut across each other, leaving open or ambiguous borderlines, conflicting criteria, and so on.

From the viewpoint of any individual, the consequence is that he finds himself at the centre of a series of concentric 'nested' circles, a series of larger and larger groups to which he belongs, whose boundaries can never cut across each other.

The innermost circle will consist of the independent household; the next circle, the group of households sharing a real or supposed common ancestor, and defining a 'little clan'; the next circle, a bigger clan unit, or a whole village; and so forth. A member of a segmentary society can perhaps experience a conflict of priorities (should he attend to a feud between sub-groups before attending to a war between groups?), but he can hardly experience an outright conflict of loyalties, groups being at least in principle so arranged that there are no overlaps.

Segmentation is a kind of model of abstraction at its nearest. Distant ancestors are like abstract concepts, denoting more (people alive now) and connoting less; close ancestors are more concrete, 'denoting' fewer descendants and 'connoting' more intense relationships.

It is a formal property of 'trees' in the mathematical sense that there is only one route from any point to any other point. Segmentary systems, as expressed for instances in the genealogies\(^1\) of persons involved in them, are indeed also 'trees' in just this sense. On the genealogical tree, one way only leads from any one man to any other. Hence, in as far as obligations and loyalties are defined, there can be no ambiguity in the relationship between two men located on the same 'tree', nor in the moral claims and expectations generated by that relationship. The formal property of uniqueness of connection between any two points on a 'tree' has

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\(^1\) Berbers use the Arabic word for 'tree' to describe genealogies.
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this important social correlate — the social relation between any two individuals is (again, at least ideally) unambiguous and unique.

A tree-like structure of the kind described is essential if the first and critical feature, namely reliance on opposition to generate cohesion, is really to characterise the society. The tree-like structure ensures that for any conflict that may arise, there are some groups that can be activated and which will 'balance' each other. A balance of power does not need to be devised, pressure-groups and counter-pressure-groups do not need to be invented and recruited: they are ever-ready, they exist potentially all along the line, available 'in all sizes', and their rivalry, even if latent, ensures the activation of the relevant groups when a conflict does crop up.

Such series of groups of all sizes are required, if the segmentary principle is to do its work. This is important, and perhaps not immediately obvious. Conflict may arise anywhere. Two brothers may quarrel over the use of a tool, two cousins may quarrel over a field, two clans in a village about the upkeep of an irrigation channel, two villages may quarrel about a pasture, two tribes may come into conflict at a large market. In an anarchic, rulerless society, whenever a conflict arises, whether it be between two individuals who are closely related or who are extremely distant, or whether it be between whole groups of people, it is no use appealing to the police, or to the government to protect you and to settle the matter, for the simple reason that there is no police and no government. You can only hope that your own group will be activated into loyalty and cohesion by the threat of the other group, either because the interests of the other members of the group are directly threatened, or because they need your help in familiar cases, and also because they can suppose that tolerated aggression in one case will only encourage repetition. But before such a threat can activate 'your' group, there must be some latent sense be such a group, there must be a set of people who can identify themselves as belonging to the group. Because, as indicated, one cannot tell in advance at which level of size, or at which distance in relationship, the conflict will arise, a segmentary society can only work if groups are indeed available in all sizes.

The point that a segmentary society provides cohesion-precipitating hostile groups 'all along the line', in all sizes, is liable to require two qualifications, one concerning the top, the other the bottom, of the scale of social units. The scale must come to an end somewhere, at both ends, and at these ends (by definition: what makes it the end is that there is no further wider or smaller group) there is no-one to be activated into opposition, no one available to right a wrong. Concretely: at the bottom, if one of two brothers kills the other, who is there to right the wrong? From the viewpoint of other groups of brothers, he — or rather the fraternal pair which has now weakened itself — has merely spited his own face: he hasn't harmed them. Similarly, at the top, once we reach the largest available group which can even conceive of itself as a group, we again enter the realm of political and moral anarchy. There is no entity which could apply sanctions, which could be activated into action, at that level either.

This conclusion — no one is available to resist or penalise aggression at either the ultimate molecular, or the final top-size levels — follows from the model of a 'pure' segmentary society. A pure segmentary society is one in which there is no agency which could resist or punish transgressions of rules in the abstract, but one which only has groups and sub-groups so arranged that groups are always available to resist the transgressions when directed at them.¹

To what extent does this conclusion, deduced from the abstract and simplified model, apply to the concrete society under consideration? The answer is that it applies in part: the society does approximate to the pure model in some degree, but it does not conform to it completely.

First, consider the respects in which it does conform to the model. At the top level of scale, there are no regional or other concepts in terms of which groups can even name or conceive themselves, once one gets past the top rung of names on the segmentary ladder (such as Ata Atta, Ait Sochman, Ait Yafelman, Ait

⁰Note that this does not mean that segmentary tribailism knows no 'universal' moral rules. A stereotype of the tribesman, popular among laymen, notably philosophers, is of a man totally enslaved to the rules within his In-group, and totally immoral outside it. This is doubly wrong. Segmentary societies are very common. Tribesmen within them cannot be enslaved to rules within them, for there is no absolute 'within': what is an In-group for one purpose, is an Out-group for another. Secondly, it is not the case that universal, open, impersonally formulated rules of morality are not present: they are, on the contrary, quite clearly present. Their enforcement will vary according to the strength and determination of the group which has suffered from their violation; but that determination will depend in part on the merits of the case. The mechanism of this is discussed in detail below, in connection with the 'collective oaths', p. 104.
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Messaq). And in fact, on the last occasion on which something occurred which might have activated cohesion of the Atlas as a whole, during the French conquest, no such total group was indeed stimulated into existence. The conquest consequently could be and was a piecemeal affair.

At the molecular level, tribesmen of the central Atlas recognise the concept of ‘good’ fratricide, which is no concern of anyone outside the group of brothers among whom it occurred, and which consequently fully confirms to what one should expect from the abstract consideration. Cases of such fratricide are remembered.

On the other hand, there are ways in which the society diverges from the pure segmentary model. At the top, there is the concept of being a Muslim which can on occasion, and historically has, united or rather created groups of any size, well above the ceiling set by the existing stock of nested tribal names and groups. To engender such groups is not easy, and of course it helps if the opposition to such a group consists of infidels or heretics. The leaders who, throughout Moroccan history, succeeded in bringing about such supra-segmentary cohesion, were either religious reformers (during the mediaeval period) or persons possessing special Islamic holiness through descent from the Prophet (during the subsequent centuries).

At the molecular level, a non-segmentary principle can also be seen in operation in the concept of ‘bad’ fratricide, in the case of which the killing of the brother is held to be unjustifiable, and the larger group (village, clan) exacts compensation to itself from the ‘bad’ fratricide. What makes this unsegmentary is that the total group takes action against a part of itself for the maintenance of moral order: in the segmentary case, it is always one group which takes action against another, to defend itself against an infringement of the moral order directed at it.

‘Good’ fratricide, of a brother held to be a scoundrel, is of course liable to be not merely permissible, but laudatory and even obligatory. Take a brother whose misdeeds are not only a direct nuisance to his own brethren, but which are also liable to activate outside aggression against them by other groups, who will of course in this context only be able to revenge themselves on the brothers as a whole, not on the individual culprit. In such circumstances, killing a member of one’s own kin-group may be the only way (one step more drastic than letting him down at the collective oath) of maintaining external peace. The occasions on which fratricide is not held to be an offence fit admirably into the segmentary pattern.

But a group can be activated by an offender within it and not merely by an opposed group outside, and it can take corporate action, qua groups, against a part of itself. This is un-segmentary behaviour. This can happen in the cases of offences other than fratricide. For instance, adultery may be expiated by a donation towards the group to which both adulterer and cuckold belong, and not just to the offended sub-group. The adulterer expiates by providing a feast for the group as a whole. Here a group is demanding and obtaining restitution for the violation of its moral order, rather than that a sub-group is obtaining restitution from another for a wrong suffered. Defence of the moral order as such, as opposed to defence of the group, is un-segmentary behaviour.

At the top, this society does possess devices for activating groups irrespective of whether a pre-existing notion of such a group (territorially or in terms of kinship) is available. One such device is the possibility of affiliation, which of course also operates at lower levels where pre-existing groups are available, and which is quite essential in facilitating re-alignments, the threat of which in turn is a necessary sanction of cohesion inside groups (e.g., when facing the ordeal of collective oath). But more important for our purposes is the leadership provided by the saints and the common sentiment of allegiance of Islam, which finds its expression in respect for the saints as descendants of the Prophet, and for their arbitration as (supposedly) Shi'a or divine law. (The general illiteracy has, until very recent years, obviated the danger of checking their pronouncements against documentary evidence of the divine law, i.e., the Koran.) Saintly leadership makes it possible, given the need and favourable circumstances, to weld together groups, particularly large-scale groups, which do not correspond to any of the groups latent in the segmentary system, or even groups which cut across them.

The saints themselves are also segmentary: but just as their services modify and indeed facilitate the pure operation of the segmentary principle amongst the lay tribes, so also its working is modified, in quite a different way which is to be described, amongst the saints themselves.

(3) Unilinear descent. The connection between this and the
notion of a segmentary system is not always wholly clear. In *Tribes without Rulers*, a general and comparative account of this type of society, John Middleton and David Tait write:

... the essential features (of being segmentary) are the 'nesting' attribute of segmentary series and the characteristic of being in a state of continual segmentation and complementary opposition. The series may be of lineages... or it may be of territorial groups...

This seems to imply (rightly) that segmentation cannot be defined in terms of unilinear kinship, for the segmentation may be simply in territorial terms. Nevertheless I doubt whether the two - segmentation and unilinear kinship - can be wholly separated. The crucial defining characteristic of segmentary societies is not merely the presence of segmentation, but also the absence (or nearly) of anything else. Hence it follows that kinship would either have to be unimportant, in the sense of not generating any significant social groups, or, if present and defining social groups, it must do so on lines parallel with the general principles of segmentation of the society. But it can only do this if it is tree-like in pattern, in other words it if is unilinear. It follows that, although a segmentary society need not be organised in lineages at all, it can be, at least, unilinear. Any more complicated kinship system would generate conflicting ties.

(4) Monadism: I use this term for one very interesting feature of segmentary societies: namely that groups of all the various sizes resemble or mirror each other's structure. The smaller group is an embryo tribe, the tribe is the smaller group writ large.

I suspect that the presence of this characteristic is sometimes

2Professor E.E. Evans-Pritchard, in *Africas Political Systems* (edited by M. Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard), p. 265;
3"A tribal section has most of the attributes of a tribe: name, sense of patriotism, a dominant lineage, territorial distinction, economic resources, and so forth. Each is a tribe in miniature, and they differ from tribes only in size, in degree of integration, and in that they unite for war and acknowledge a common principle of justice."

With Herbers the recognition of common principles of justice has no next upper social ceiling. It is not quite clear from this passage how far down the scale of segmentation Professor Evans-Pritchard intends his assertion of similarity to extend: but granting a kind of formal similarity, and the importance of the fact that units of different sizes look similar and are conceptualised similarly by their members, it seems also important to stress the differences in function of groups of different sizes.

**Density of Segmentation**

An intriguing area for comparative research is this: what determines the number of steps in a segmentary system, the number of nested units? Or in other words, given an Occamian genealogy in which ancestors are not multiplied beyond necessity, what determines the number of necessary ancestors? Various possibilities arise:

(a) That the number of steps in the system depends on the

1For instance: disputes between small groups tend to be focused on some person, and co-jurors in collective oaths are selected by agnatic proximity to that personality. Disputes between large groups are different: they tend not to have a person as their focus, and co-jurors are in effect selected representatives rather than co-responsible agnates. Interestingly, these representatives are liable to be selected by the opposing group rather than by the group they represent.
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number of common interests-bonds, each step corresponding to a
shared interest. The lowest group is a set of people who are liable
to inherit from each other and have priority over each others'
daughters, for instance: the next group might be one sharing a
continuous stretch of irrigated land and hence sharing a joint
stake in the defence of it and its water-rights, the next group might
be one corresponding to the joint use of an extended pasture, and
so on.

(b) Shared interests, by generating a group, may also generate
segmentation downwards: if, for instance, a group X is generated
by shared rights in a pasture, then the self-administration of X,
given that it is a segmentary society, also requires that there be
sub-groups of X which should balance each other in the internal
running of X, irrespective of whether these sub-groups themselves
also correspond to some natural shared interest in the local ecology.

(c) Possibly the steps or nestings is determined simply by the
need of a certain density of them: a ladder is not a ladder unless the
rungs are reasonably close to each other. This could be simply a
matter of definition: a 'segmentary' society (in other respects) with
only very few nested steps might simply fail to be classified as such.

But perhaps there is more to it than that: it is difficult to see how
a society with very few nestings - say a large tribe with only one
step between the total tribe and the extended family - could possibly
function as a segmentary society, that is to say maintain
some degree of order by means of the balancing of groups. There
would only be a large number of small sub-groups belonging to
a large one, but not organised in any intermediate groups. Hence,
if any conflict arose involving more than two of the minute groups,
but less than the total groups, there would be no pre-arranged
alignments to keep the peace through 'balance'. The number of
possible alignments would be too great and too unpredictable.
Either such a society would not function at all and be genuinely
anarchic, or some principle other than segmentary fusion and
fusion would be involved. So one may argue that just as, for
instance, a physical inverted pyramid of acrobats requires that the
'expansion' from the solitary man at the apex on the ground to the
n men at the top, should be by gradual steps leading from one
to n, so a segmentary system can only work if the multiplication of
segments at any one level is not too great. (This argument is in a
way a generalisation of argument (b).)

DENSITY OF SEGMENTATION

This point can be put in another way: the question of the den-
sity of nesting is connected with the important feature of segment-
ary societies: in such a society, one does not simply belong to a
group, one has a definite position in it, a niche. (And this does not
mean, of course, what it would mean in our context: it does not
mean that the society is stratified and one belongs to some stratum
nor does it mean occupational specialisation. Indeed, segmentary
societies are often fairly unstratified and without much occupa-
tional specialisation.) These niches are located vertically, as it
were, and not horizontally, and in a social rather than a geographical
space (though the two have a certain limited correspondence, the
nature of which varies a great deal). A Berber's niche is located by
inquiring after the identity of his co-jurors, who are those who will
be called to account for his acts, and vice versa, and with whom he
shares inheritance expectations (unless he is an accepted stranger)
and rights over brides. When as an exile or for some other reasons
he has to settle in a new location, the first thing to do - they point
out and stress - is to find co-jurors. A procedure exists for placing
a shame-compulsion on a group to admit a member in this way.

It is a feature, perhaps a defining one, of segmentary society that
it pre-arranges (but does not fully pre-determine) what in fact are
alliances (and thus in principle products of human volition), in
terms of real or putative facts about kinship, or sometimes in terms
of territorial allocation.

The game differs from some international free-for-all in that
there are 'natural allies' and that the rules are biased in favour of
honouring these natural alliances. At the same time, the game also
presupposes that they will not always be honoured, that the option of
re-alignment exists and that it is sometimes advantageous to take it.

The need for 'density' of nested segments arises from the need
for pre-arranged alliance. Suppose nesting not to be dense, so that
from a large group one descends immediately to, say, thirty-two
sub-groups. If conflict arises within the larger group, and no pre-
arranged alliances, expressed in terms of special joint rights and in
terms of kinship myths exist, the possibility of manœuvre in
seeking alliances is so great as to make the situation excessively
unstable. Hence, if stability-without-government is to obtain - and
this I take to be a central characteristic of segmentary societies - it
is essential that there be some further step or steps between the
one and the thirty-two.
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Of course, there are tribes, in other ways segmentary, where there is such a great jump from one to thirty-two do occur.1 But then they have, and needs must have, a permanent reasonably strong leadership, a politically specialised and elevated sub-group, and to this extent they then are not purely segmentary, in that the relationship of this sub-group to the rest cannot be simply explained in terms of ‘balance’. Central Atlas Berbers are more purely segmentary in this sense, and manage to avoid the use of specialised permanent power-holders within tribes, in a way to be described. Correspondingly, nesting is dense. There are no big leaps between rungs on this ladder.

(d) The precise extent and density of segmentation may in part genuinely depend on historical factors. There are amongst Berbers, for instance, phenomena which strongly suggest this: the survival of small groups or even mere families who ‘structurally’, in terms of the genealogy, have the position of clans and ideally should balance a whole populous clan, as its ancestor was a brother of the ancestor of that populous clan, thus making the two groups co-ordinate on the genealogy. But in reality, demographic inequality forces the small group to act as a sub-part of the larger one with which, genealogically, it could claim parity. Demography and genealogy may diverge, and the former will generally prevail: and the genealogy is not always ‘manipulated’ so as to make the situation neat and symmetrical. There is indeed often a good motive for clinging to positions in genealogical systems which have effectively lapsed; such retained positions imply claims which it may be impolitic or impracticable to assert at the time, or even for the foreseeable future, but which one day it may be opportune to re-activate. Perhaps Berbers are not unique in clinging to more or less dormant claims, ready for re-assertion should the time come (like the alleged custom of some Fez families of retaining the keys of their houses in Granada, ready for the day when the expulsion of Muslims is reversed). A step in the segmentary ladder, a nested group, may be kept in being not by a present shared interest, but by a past one, coupled with the possibility that it may one day become an effective one again.

1 I have two examples in mind, one from Iran and the other from Arabia, and I am indebted to Dr Fredrik Barth and to Mr Al Faour of the Fadl tribe for this information.

SELF-MAINTEAINING ORDER AND DISORDER

Self-maintaining Order and Disorder

There are some other crucial questions about segmentary society in general. One is, how efficient is in fact this balancing mechanism? A sceptic might well object that the idea of a beautiful natural equilibrium looks too good to be true: what prevents it toppling over? The answer is that it does frequently topple over. The segmentary mechanism has some efficacy, but in part its ‘functioning’ is a kind of optical illusion: when it fails, when it does topple over, the subsequent arrangement comes once again to exemplify the same pattern as obtained before the break-down: what other pattern is available? The participants may lack the concepts or customs required for anything more elaborate (whilst those of segmentary organisation are easily available to them), and in any case, a segmentary organisation is a kind of minimum of what can be re-established: anything more would require not merely the break-down of the previous equilibrium but positive inventiveness and great effort. If the surrounding area is segmentary, the pattern has an obvious tendency to spread, by a kind of imperative emulation: either combine like us or join us! (Or both!) The result is the same. So, in all but the name of the groups, and possibly even in name, the old order is re-established.

So as to work at all, the system must not work too well. (The same will be seen to hold in connection with a specialised application of the system, the legal procedure of collective oath.) The driving force behind the cohesion of the groups is fear, fear of aggression by others in an anarchic environment. If the balancing system really worked perfectly, producing a kind of perpetual peaceful balance of power at all levels, the society would cease to be anarchic, and fear would cease to be a powerful spring of action. (It would be too much to expect people to be motivated by a distant memory or awareness of the theoretical possibility of anarchy.) In this, most unlikely, contingency, we might perhaps find ourselves with a perfect anarchist (but not ‘anarchic’) society without constraint or violence, in which both violence and government were absent – but not with a segmentary society. The persistence of a segmentary society requires, paradoxically, that its mechanisms should be sufficiently inefficient to keep fear in being as the sanction of the system.
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Equality

A further and crucial question is, to what extent are segmentary systems, by definition, egalitarian? To what extent must it be equal segments that balance? In fact, societies which in some ways may plausibly be described as segmentary are not always egalitarian and unstratified.

Nevertheless, it seems to me desirable to retain egalitarianism in the definition of segmentary society, or at any rate of a pure segmentary society, for the following reason: in as far as inegalitarian and/or unsymmetric relationships exist and are sustained in a society, it can hardly be the segmentary principle alone which is responsible for sustaining them, for keeping them in being. Indeed, these unsymmetrically related groups may have a tree-like structure internally, and they may even be incorporated in a wider 'tree'; and, moreover, the opposition of segments at each level may be a factor, amongst others, in maintaining the tree. Nevertheless, the asymmetries themselves cannot be explained in this way, at least not without qualification. 'Segmentary' explanations always cut both ways: asymmetric relationships are those which do not cut both ways. Hence asymmetric, inegalitarian relationships cannot be explained by segmentation alone!

However, segmentary systems are seldom if ever pure. The

1Middleton and Tait (p. 8) observe that Durkheim's use of the term 'segmentary' is different from the one relevant here. But there does seem to me to be an essential connection between the two uses (though perhaps Middleton and Tait do not wish to deny this), through the notion of non-specialisation and repetition contained in Durkheim's concept. These entail, the egalitarianism which is also essential for the mechanics of a 'segmentary' society in the current sense. If specialisation of groups - politically or economically or ritually - occurs, they cannot simply 'balance' each other, but their complementarity gives rise to a new factor of cohesion. Conversely, if they do simply balance each other, they cannot be specialised.


'pure' ideal type is useful primarily in highlighting the kinks and unevennesses of real segmentary societies. Some of these may require extraneous factors for their emergence, others may be precipitated, as it were, out of the even, undifferentiated texture through its own needs without an initial asymmetry. This is the case with the 'saints', who are a kind of uneven excrecence in a segmentary society.

What accounts for the asymmetries? One must distinguish between the explanation of why they are there at all, what mechanisms sustain them and what needs they satisfy, and the explanation of why they arise at the particular points of the society at which in fact they are found. The latter type of explanation might be thought particularly difficult, in as far as a segmentary society is, by definition, symmetrical. What reasons could be found within a symmetrical society for an asymmetry? If all clans are like, why should just this or that segment turn itself into (say) a holy one, unlike the others?

This problem is not as serious as it may sound when formulated in the abstract. The main thing is to answer the first question - why the society needs this or that asymmetry at all, what needs and mechanisms will sustain this or that asymmetrical institution. Such an explanation would not necessarily require an account of the first appearance and origin of the institution; but when (as in this case) the account of the functioning of it also includes an account of how the institutions ensures its own diffusion, then the explanations of origins (at least of individual instances, if not of the very idea of the institution as such), and the explanation of how it is sustained, are one. The normal functioning of the institution includes its own reproduction and diffusion.

When this question is answered (when we know why the society has saints at all), the second question, of the form - why just *here* and not *there*? - would not be so important. Societies are not like Buridan's ass, paralysed by a totally symmetrical situation which excludes the possibility of a reason for this rather than that (for in the case of that unhappy animal, every reason favouring the left bundle of hay was paralleled, ex hypothesi, by a similarly strong reason for the right bundle). In fact, as will emerge, it is possible in this case to give reasons not merely why saints should flourish at all, but why they should flourish in the very locations in which they are found.
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Disposition and Process

Segmentation denotes both a process or episode on the one hand, and a condition or disposition on the other. When a previously joint family one day splits up into separate units based on each of the hitherto 'undivided' brothers, or if a large tribe acquires a new piece of territory distant from its previous habitat, and a part of it goes off to settle there, these are definite, concrete, dateable events. This is an episode or process. On the other hand, two segments of a tribe, or two related families, can also live in a permanent state of 'segmentation': that is, they simultaneously keep each other in check by mutual hostility, and yet also ward off outside aggression by being ready to combine in defence against it. This is a permanent condition: it is not necessarily manifest in any one dateable action. Its manifestations are manifold, and may even remain latent rather than visible.

Men in general have a difficulty in conceptualising such latent, discontinuous, dispositional states, and tend to think of them as somehow permanent and substantial. One way of doing this is to invent some mystic quality which is conceived as permanently present, thus conferring permanence and substantiality on a disposition which, at the phenomenal level of events, is discontinuous or even erratic. Segmentary societies do not necessarily take this path: they do so if they are also 'totemic', and explain the relationship of various clans to each other in terms of a permanent mystic relationship between clan members and totemic animals. Berber tribes are of course not totemic. They employ the other method available for conceptualising a social relationship: they conceive it as hinging on a specific and concrete past event. The fact that two large groups are in a friendly, 'fraternal' relationship to each other is conceived to be the consequence of their being the descendants of two men who were brothers. A supposed past concrete event — cohabitation and subsequent separation of two brothers and their families — symbolises a present dispositional, permanent relationship of two large groups.

At this point, it is essential to note an asymmetry between large

and small groups. In the case of small groups, the concrete episodic symbol and the discontinuous dispositional reality are congruent. The symbolism tends to be veridical. Two related families have 'fraternal' ties; and often, in reality, two now deceased grandfathers were in fact brothers and really did once have a joint household which subsequently divided in a peaceful manner. In other words, the belief not merely ratifies a present set of relationships, but also (in many typical cases) is literally true.

In the case of large groups, the matter is more complex. If a tribe divides through the acquisition of new territory and its settlement by some of its members, it is unlikely (supposing the tribe to have two sub-clans, A and B) that all members of one clan will go to the new territory, and all members of the other will stay behind in the old. It is far more likely that some from each clan will go, some will stay. Thus the actual process of large-group fission does not correspond to the neat parting-of-brothers image. The real process (the parting of large numbers of people, drawn from both clans, now) does not correspond to the symbolic process (two brothers-descendants parting long ago), which is invoked to explain dispositional reality, and the non-correspondence is more than merely a matter of the symbolic event, high up the genealogy, being simplified, and of reducing the number of dramatic personae. Stories about brothers can and do correctly, though selectively, account for what really happened to small groups, but they are very likely to distort more fundamentally the true story of what happens to large ones. At both levels, they can correctly 'symbolise' the disposition: brothers oppose each other but combine against outsiders, and this is indeed true, both of fraternal families and of fraternal clans or tribes. But only at one level (that of small-scale groups), does the story about brothers also correctly represent what actually happened at the historical point of fission. Two fraternal families are in fact generally descended from two brothers who one day decided to separate their households: but two parts of a tribe, settled in two distinct areas, say two valleys, are not in fact descended from two brothers who, as single households, went to each of the two valleys in question. And, more important, it is not even the case that the territorial division between the two valleys corresponds to the division of the tribe into two clans prior to the occupation of the second valley (if, in fact, such expansion did occur historically). For if a tribe conquers new territory, it is
generally not the case that all members of one clan occupy it, whilst all members of the other stay at home: more plausibly, the spoils are shared, and some members of each clan go to the newly acquired lands. With time, this may, but need not, be obscured by the formation of two new top-level clans, corresponding to the new territorial division but supposing themselves to date back to some original pair of brothers.

The memory of what 'really happened' (i.e., what I believe truly happened) is moreover perpetuated in many of the larger tribal groups by current genealogical belief. A large tribe (e.g., the Ait Atta, or the Ait Daud u Ali of the Ait Sochman) will possess a number of sub-clans, say A, B, C, D and E. The total tribe possesses territory in two or more areas. Each of the sub-clans will possess lands and pasture rights in both areas (as is the case with the Ait Daud u Ali) or in all the numerous areas (as is the case with the Ait Atta). Why so? It seems to me that an explanation can be offered both in terms of 'true history' and in terms of the continued and contemporary usefulness of the associated beliefs and institutions. Historically, when a tribe acquires new lands, it can only do so by a joint effort in which a number of clans co-operate, and when the new land is acquired, each of the participant clans claims its share of the territorial booty, and none is willing to give up its original lands. Hence fission takes place cutting across each of the old clans; henceforth, territorial division cuts across the old clan lines (as indeed is conspicuously the case with the two tribes cited).

But a functional explanation in terms of the current usefulness of the division, is also available. Once the arrangement exists, a motive exists for the tribe as a whole to perpetuate it, and moreover, sanctions also exist causing each sub-group to toe the line. Suppose a tribe to possess two or more distinct frontiers (i.e., frontiers with diverse other tribes and potential enemies), as it virtually always does: if each clan is represented on each frontier, this increases sanctions making for cohesion of the tribe as a whole. If conflict breaks out at a frontier distant from a given tribesman or face-to-face group, a conflict which does not constitute an immediate threat to the individual or group in question, then not merely the abstract and high-level obligation of tribal loyalty, but also the more concrete and lower-level obligation of clan-loyalty calls them to action. And what is to sustain even this more concrete clan-loyalty? Not, indeed, unaided sentiment. The call of the blood is sustained, roughly, by pasture rights, inheritance expectations, and rights to brides.

Pasture rights are possibly the most important of these factors, or at least constitute a consideration which, in the ecological conditions prevailing in the Atlas, even in principle (unlike inheritance and preferential bride-right, the other factors) is not liable to erosion by time and the passage of generations. It hinges on ecological differentiation. In the case of both the tribes mentioned, tribal lands range over areas suitable as pasture at quite different seasons or under different conditions. The land of the Ait Atta is particularly striking in this respect, ranging from the scorched Sahara edge to the highest regularly snow-covered plateau grasslands on the north side of the Atlas watershed. A tribesman knows that he may need the distant pastures in which he has a stake and which are guarded by his clan brethren, when, in due course, snow or drought, as the case may be, will render his nearby pasture useless. Such conditions may render him particularly sensitive to the call of the blood, when he hears that his geographically distant brethren are being threatened (notwithstanding the fact that, blood or not, he patently wishes his cousins to the devil when they in turn come to share his own pastures, when their flocks trespass on his fields, and particularly when, under modern political conditions, he no longer needs their aid to guard his frontier). The Ait Atta are a tribe occupying particularly extensive and diversified territory, and their legends bear testimony to the danger of failure of cohesion between distant territorial groups, unless each clan (in terms of whom pasture rights are defined) is represented at each frontier. Each clan is also represented at the territorial centre. The Ait Atta segmentation and chieftaincy system is double: clan and territorial considerations are, as it were, shot through. A chief-of-the-land (amghar n'tumazir) is elected by each territorial group, by rotation-and-complementarity (see below, p. 81) amongst the locally represented clans; but if a threat to the total tribe activates the institution of chieftaincy for the Ait Atta as a whole, the upper chief is elected by rotation and complementarity in terms not of the territorial sub-divisions, but of clan-subdivisions.

Not all the tribes within the Ahansal sanctuary catchment area exhibit variants of this type of pattern. Other tribal types can be
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found. Those tribes inhabiting fairly compact territory, especially if it is a distant valley or valley-system, may not need territorially discontinuous clans. For instance, the Ait Bu Gmez do not even possess a genealogical theory to account for their larger units, and hence could not have a cross-cutting system even if they wished: at the level of the larger units, they only possess territorial groups anyway. Also the Ait Bu Gmez are agriculturists above all, and diversified pasture rights would not in their case constitute such an important social cement. The Ait Messat possess a fairly compact valley system, though not an alluvial one like that of Bu Gmez; but their territory is not ecologically diversified, and their clans are territorially compact. The Ait Mhand possess territory not clearly delimited by natural features, and not rich agriculturally; but they seem to be a fairly 'new' and ad hoc tribe, without belief in a common origin, and the clans they possess could hardly afford to be discontinuous - each needs contiguity to establish such cohesion as it can muster.

Fission and Fusion

A father may have two sons, but no son can have two fathers. It follows that a segmentary and patrilineal society, which mostly conceives of relationships between its own sub-groups in genealogical terms, borrowed from patriarchy alone, possesses notions through which it can express fission, but none for fusion. This, of course, creates no difficulty with respect to segmentation as a condition. The condition is timeless. When it needs to symbolise the union of the group, it goes back to the shared and distant granddad, and when it wishes to highlight internal dis-unity, it looks to the plurality of brothers or grandsons in the subsequent generations. It is not time which is a moving image of eternity: it is timeless genealogy which is a static image of social movement. But there would seem to be no concepts which would characterise fusion as a definite, dateable process.

Yet fusion plainly does occur. On the rough assumption of a stability of population and unchanging density of segmentation, at any one level of size, the number of fissions, minus the number of extinctions of lines, must equal the number of fusions. We have no means of establishing the truth of the assumption of stability of population or segmentary density, but something roughly of that kind must presumably have held for at least some periods during the traditional order. Moreover, there is also plenty of direct evidence of the occurrence of fusions. To assume that they did not occur would lead us to postulate an absurd and phenomenal rate of population growth in recent centuries, as implicit in the tribal genealogies (were these taken at face value). How is fusion conceptualised?

One can assert as a general principle about Berber society that whenever one finds a relationship, it will be based either on a belief about kinship, or on a prestation, or both. Either a kin link or a 'sacrifice to' a person or group is the ratification of obligation. A person or group wishing to re-allocate itself on the tree of alignments will make a sacrifice of an animal to the desired new group, thereby placing it under an obligation to receive it. It is asserted that such an act places the recipient under an obligation, and that the receiving group cannot refuse the request. I certainly have not heard of such a request being refused, notwithstanding the undisputed fact that certain quarrelsome and litigious people, who frequently re-allocate themselves by this method in the intra-village structure of co-juring and hence co-responsible groups, are a well-known nuisance. Re-allocation, it should be added, can, but need not, involve physical transplantation: an individual can re-align himself in a village, or a whole clan can re-align itself with another tribe (as one of the clans of the Ait Isha aligned itself with the Ait Mhand), without any physical movement being involved. On the other hand, if an individual or family seek a new niche in a new tribe, obviously they must migrate.

It is not quite clear why nuisance re-alignments within a village should be tolerated by the receiving group. In fact they are, and locally it is explained simply in terms of moral obligation, of shame-compulsion. Possibly part of the answer is that the time to let down the unwelcome new ally - if such he is - is at the next conflict and collective oath, and that this helps to explain why the procedure of collective oath is not always pre-determined in favour of the testifying party (see below, p. 104). In the case of re-alignment of large groups, or the migration of small ones or single individuals, the answer is more obvious: one is receiving a new ally, a free reinforcement. Note that in the central High Atlas, (unlike possibly the Western High Atlas or parts of the Anti-Atlas), population pressure had not reached the point of saturation:
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there was still more land, notably forest, which could be tilled, and by and large the property of a group was not so much what they owned but what they could cultivate and what they could defend. (Individual settlements might well reach saturation. For instance, the main lodge of the Iahsiane tended to find new homes for refugees from feuds who sought its sanctuary, rather than absorb them itself.)

The main motive for individual migration was, of course, homicide and the feud, a flight from the avengers. As one travels around the villages of the areas, one comes not infrequently across individuals who either underwent such a transplantation in their youth or are offsprings of such immigrants. It is said that if you flee from a feud within group A, whose member you are, the best place to flee to is the general enemies of A. Far from taking their own vengeance on the refugee, they will apparently welcome a recruit who now can be relied on to be loyal, for his way home is barred. In effect, it is possible to 'choose freedom' by fleeing to the enemy, even though in this society the enemy is not differentiated ideologically. In the days of the French, such migratory flights ceased to be customary. Larger groups were not allowed to indulge in collective violence, and individual murderers, if caught, found involuntary sanctuary in prison. (The institution of blood money continued, tribal customary law continuing to be valid, and the tribepeople assimilated imprisonment to the exile which had previously been imposed on the murderer, unless the victim's family agreed to forego it.) On the other hand, the game of intra-village re-alignment, involving no physical transplantation, went on.

Given this possibility of, as it were, 'naturalisation' in a new group, independently of kinship belief and contrary to systems of alliances, one might ask whether the whole idea of a segmentary structure is not a myth, whether in fact the society is not much more fluid than the neat tree-like patterns of group genealogy and alignment would suggest. Such a conclusion would be quite mistaken. Berber society of the central High Atlas may not be totally rigid — birth and kinship do not hold the individual in an iron vice — but it is certainly not very fluid. This is emphatically not one of the societies in which a floating population settles in variable patterns around a framework defined in 'segmentary' terms. In any one village, the proportion of male immigrants will

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be under ten per cent, usually well under this ratio. People do not re-allocate themselves to the point of migration unless they must (usually because of homicide). Berber society really is gnostic throughout; it is not a case of cognatic clusters around an agnostic skeleton. The odd uxorilocal family does turn up, but it is fairly rare, and the practice is held to be dishonourable. The immigrants, 'people of the sacrifice' (u tighiel), do gain new co-jurors, but they are significantly located at the bottom of the line of jurors. In general, inheritance expectations at home and the disadvantages of immigrant status in the new community, are sufficient to discourage any easy and frequent mobility between geographically distinct groups.

Leaving aside individual migrations, how weighty is the segmentary structure in the life of the society at large? Some indication can be obtained by looking either at the way in which tribal groups come to pay homage to the saints, or at the way in which they resisted or submitted to the French or, for that matter, at their comportment in post-independence party politics or during the one rising in the region since Independence.

We find that policy decisions do not necessarily follow the cleavages of the segmentary structure. Nothing would be more erroneous than to see the tribesmen enslaved in thought and deed to their clans, unable to weigh consequences or to act independently. But it would be equally wrong to disregard the ordered hierarchy of tribal groups as some kind of decorative elaboration, without weight when the moment of political decision comes. The segmentary organisation displays a set of alignments, ratified not merely by custom, sentiment and ritual, but more weightily by shared interests which provides the baseline for alliances and enmities, for aid and hostility, when conflict arises. Calculation, feeling, new interests, diplomatic ingenuity, may at times cause the final alignments to depart at some points: but the initial and fairly strong presumption is that allegiances of tribe and clan will be honoured, and that other inducements must have been operative if they were not honoured.

*Some Middle Atlas tribes institutionalise a special status, which confers that of uxorilocal husband and client-labourer (of his wife's patrilinage). Cf. Commtt. R. Asspinio, Contributo à l'étude du Droit Consulaire Berbère Maro-
The Relevance of Segmentation

The organisation of the Berber tribes of Central Morocco is of a theoretical interest for a number of reasons. Roughly speaking, there are two scholarly traditions to which their study is relevant: previous studies of North African societies, and the tradition of 'structural' analyses in social anthropology. In the past, these two traditions were sometimes insulated from each other. This is no longer true.

From the viewpoint of structural social anthropology, the interest of Berber society is that it provides an exceptionally good specimen of the segmentary principle, of the maintenance of political order over extensive areas, large populations and diversified and complementary ecologies, without much in the way of a concentration of power, a centralised state. In many ways, the segmentary principle operates among them with remarkable purity: Berbers are not stratified into aristocrats and commoners, clans do not possess permanently dominant sheikhs families, the pattern of preferred (parallel patrilateral) marriage merely reinforces the patrilineal structure and does not create any cross-cutting links, the elective and rotated nature of leadership prevents it from congealing into a stratification of wealth or power, the genealogies tend to be Occamist and serve the segmentary structure and no more, the steps of segmentation are dense enough to avoid the need of other principles. From this viewpoint, my main argument is that this relative segmentary purity of the lay tribes is made possible by the saints: these inequalitarian, stratified, pacific, 'artificial' outsiders perform functions which enable the egalitarian, feud-addicted tribesmen to work their remarkably pure segmentary system. Here, a separation of powers is not merely a check on tyranny, as intended in classical political theory, but also a check on inequality. The inequalitarian potential of the society is as it were drained by the saints. Here, at least, equality and liberty go together.

In relation to previous studies of North African societies, the present argument can be seen from a different angle. In modern times, the truly outstanding analysis of Berber politics is to be found, as stated, in the studies of Robert Montagne.1 If his work,

1Les Berbères et le Mahraen au Sud du Maroc, 1936. La Vie sociale et la Vie politique des Berbères, 1931.

rich in ideas and documentation, can be summed up briefly at all, it would be as follows. First, the main order-maintaining institution amongst anarchic Berbers is a special kind of society, of internal bifurcation – the leff. Secondly, Berber society tends to oscillate between two social forms – egalitarian tribal republics, governed by assemblies (or hierarchies of assemblies) and using the leff system, and ephemeral personal tyrannies, exemplified in our time by the great caids of the South. The inherent instability of the republics and the leffs leads from time to time to the crystallisation of personal power: this, however, does not produce anything like a stable 'feudal' system (the suggestive appearance of the castles of the great robber chiefs notwithstanding), but on the contrary, in due course collapses again, and returns to the previous condition. Thus Montagne put forward a remarkable structural analysis not of a stable system, but of a permanently oscillating one, rather reminiscent in some of its general features of the theory put forward later by Dr Edmund Leach for the political systems of Highland Burma.2

Robert Montagne was fully aware of a certain significant exception to his theory of political oscillation: the 'maraboutic state', the hierarchies, such as that of the Iheansal. His remarks en passant about these quasirates are perceptive and accurate. His observations about Zawiya Ahansal are all the more remarkable in as far as Ahansal-land proper was unconquered at the time he did his study, and no European had visited Zawiya Ahansal itself. In one way, the present study simply fills in the details concerning this exception, the general characteristics of which he fully understood. The maraboutic state provides an exception, above all, by its stability: there was no oscillation, and the general political system of the tribes of the central High Atlas enabled them to escape the temporary personal tyrannies. It is curious to reflect that this hagiarchy inverts Max Weber's famous definition of the state: here we have a state, if we are to class it as such, in which it is the subjects who have the monopoly of legitimate violence, and the rulers were ex officio excluded from employing force.

I have no particular comments on Montagne's oscillation theory. I believe it to be true; but study of a recognised exception to it does not specially qualify one to discuss it. His remarks about this exception, which is the subject of this study, seem to me

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admirable. But I do have reservations concerning this theory of the lefts. These doubts about the lefts are both empirical and theoretical. The former are less interesting, but still worth mentioning.

By lefts, Montagne meant systems of alliance which were territorially discontinuous in a chess-board-like manner, and which were what I should call ‘transitive’; if tribal group A was of the same left alliance as B, and B as C, then A and C belonged to the same left. Montagne believed he could trace these checkerboard patterns in the Western High Atlas and elsewhere. It may, however, be significant that the one intensive study carried out in that very region since his day led its author to conclude that the tribe studied, the Seksawa, did not fit into the left system.¹

Whatever may be the case elsewhere, no left system in Montagne’s sense existed in the central High Atlas. The tribesmen do indeed know and use the word: but it means simply ‘alliance’. (By a characteristic quirk, the same root also means the opposite—division and divorce, and the same root also does service for marital divorce. This ambivalence of meaning is, of course, perfectly logical, especially in a segmentary setting: what is an alliance, a union, at one level, is from the viewpoint of the next higher level a division, a separation.) But alliances are not transitive, nor permanent, and they certainly do not form any chessboard pattern. If such a system existed, it would have to complement and cut across the segmentary structure: but it does not exist. Alliances do take place and links are established in addition to the segmentary alignment, but these additions form no system. Moreover, it is not possible to interpret the segmentary division itself as a left system in that sense: the number two has no pre-eminence. Sometimes, indeed, tribal groups, large or small, divide into two segments; but just as characteristically, they may subdivide differently, into (say) three or five sub-clans.²

So much for the empirical disagreement. The theoretical one is more important. Suppose that the left system does exist, and is of crucial importance in maintaining order, through the balance of power between the two lifaf (plural of left). The two moieties can

²It is only fair to put on record a disagreement on this point. Cf. Georges Drugeon, Enquête d’Histoire Religieuse du Maroc, p. 174. General Spillman (who used ‘Drugeon’ as a pen-name) in conversation with me confirmed his position on this point.

THE RELEVANCE OF SEGMENTATION

only maintain order with respect to conflicts at the level of segmentation at which the discontinuous, checkerboard alliance happens to be found. Suppose that the units composing the left are villages: then, indeed, the left may keep peace when inter-village strife arises, for each of two quarrelsome villages may invoke its own left, and the balance of power between the two may make for peace, or indeed, cause the conflict to spread.¹ But suppose there is conflict inside a village, between two sub-clans; or suppose that a pasture-sharing group of villages need to defend an adjoining pasture. (If the left is articulated in terms of villages and is discontinuous, the adjoining villages cannot be of the same moiety. If the left system is articulated in terms of larger units, the same argument applies to those units.) In brief, unlike the notion of segmentation, the notion of one-level moiety simply isn’t strong enough to account for the relative maintenance of order in an ungoverned society. (It can only control conflicts arising at the one level of segmentation, in terms of which it is itself articulated.) It can only be made to appear to do more, by a surreptitious and unconscious assumption that something like centralised or specialised agencies (chiefs or assemblies, presumably) operate and maintain order at levels other than that of the moiety. In fact, however, though chiefs and assemblies do exist, and indeed conspicuously exist at more than one level of size (this is shared ground), the mechanism of order-maintenance is not all that different at the various levels. If conflicts are contained at the levels other than those at which the left is drawn up, then the left is not essential at the one level where it does exist.

All this does not exclude the possibility of permanent checkerboard alliances in some regions: in highly sedentarised ones such as the Western High Atlas, it is not implausible. (In the central High Atlas, the migratory traditions and opportunities of the tribes make such a system less likely.) But it shows that, even if and where it exists, it is not the crux of the matter: it is only relevant to one level of segmentation, and it is only one further, albeit intriguing, kink and variant in the segmentary structure, which is itself the crucial order-maintaining institution.


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Thus the interest of the saints is manifold. From one viewpoint, they are the clue to the maintenance of a remarkably pure, symmetrical and egalitarian segmentary system. From another, they are a clue to a certain political stability within anarchy, to the absence of the periodic lapse into tyranny which Montagne saw elsewhere. From another viewpoint still, they show how complex ecological interdependence of largeish populations can function without any centralised administration endowed with means of enforcement. From another viewpoint still, they show how mountain tribesmen can embrace a scriptural religion without being able to read, and can yet opt out from a centralised state which is legitimated by that religion, without appearing to be heretics.

THE PROBLEM RESTATED

Initially, the problem was stated as concerning the existence and the nature of a hierarchy, or rule by hereditary saints. Was there, in the central High Atlas, something describable as a state, based on the religious prestige of baraka—possessing holy lineages?

This formulation is perfectly legitimate. A visitor to the central High Atlas would be assured, and in the past could have observed, the igurramen, possessors of baraka, are held worthy of reverence and with it of obedience; he would have noticed that baraka is highly concentrated, more so than its explanation in terms of descent would warrant, but in a way conducive to the effective concentration of influence; he would be assured by the igurramen that they appoint the annual secular chieftains (though he might notice that this is a misleading exaggeration), that they are the supreme court of the region, and that they communicate the unique Shara'a, Koranic legislation (though again the visitor might have his doubts about the accuracy of this claim). He would, in turn, be puzzled by some features of this 'state', such as the lack of clear boundaries, the fact that it has more than one capital and centre of power, that its citizens may have multiple allegiances within and without its boundaries, sometimes depending on the season, and so forth.

But the visitor might approach the region not with the categories of political theory in mind, but simply with an interest in kinship and segmentary organisation. A different set of phenomena would then strike him, notably that two different types of organisation are to be found, though both are patrilineal and segmentary. He would find holy and lay villages and lineages, and a tendency towards the following correlations:

Lay groups tend to be symmetrical and egalitarian; larger tribal groups tend to occupy continuous territory, they revere shrines of saints who are not their own ancestors, their own genealogies are roughly Occamist, and their segmentation is dense enough to satisfy the requirements as discussed above, but no more; there is a fairly strong tendency to endogamy, but the tribesmen make no claims to asymmetrical rights (e.g., to import but not to export brides).

Holy groups, on the other hand, display an egalitarian organisation, with uneven and sometimes very sharp concentrations of wealth and prestige (particularly the latter), an asymmetrical kinship system, with some groups (the prestigious ones) appearing to have more ancestors than their other kinsmen (or lay tribesmen), thus providing a kind of genealogically rich spinal column with poorer, shorter branches sprouting off it. As their genealogies are richer, the nesting is sometimes denser and goes beyond what the internal balancing of segments would require; their settlements are highly discontinuous in geographical space, and it is only rarely that there are adjoining villages of the same general kinship groups. They claim unreciprocated rights to wed other tribes' daughters, their settlements are centred on shrines housing their own ancestors, and so forth.

The problem concerning this striking differentiation within one territory, and the problem of the nature of the saintly state, are in fact the same. They have the same solution.