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**SOCIAL HISTORY OF YEMEN**

**Chiefdoms and Tribes in the Land of Hashid and Bakil**

2<sup>nd</sup> edition, extended and amended

*Moscow: Editorial URSS, 2006*

*E x t e n s i v e s u m m a r y <sup>1</sup>*

Due to certain factors<sup>2</sup> the first South Arabian states arose in the area of the Internal Yemeni Lowland (al-Mashriq). At the beginning, in the early 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, the main area of the South Arabian civilization looked like a bow-like strip along the edge of the ayhad desert (with the main centers in the areas of Marib, Timna<sup>4</sup>, Shabwah and the wadis al-Jawf and Markhah – Beeston 1975a: 5; 1975b: 28; Bafaqih 1985: 20–21; Robin 1984: 198; 1991c: 52; 1991e: 63 &c.). Civilization penetrated into the Yemeni Highlands sometime later, and this process seems to have been often connected to the subjugation of the considerable territories of the Highlands by the Lowland states, first of all by the Sabaean and Qatabanian «commonwealths». It was also connected to the cultural influence of the Lowland communities, colonization &c.<sup>3</sup>

In the Middle Period (the 1<sup>st</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD) we see the Highlands politically dominating in Yemen (Beeston 1975a: 5; 1975b: 29; Rhodokanakis 1927: 113; Robin 1982b: 17; 1984: 212; 1991c: 52; 1991e: 63, 67 &c.; Korotayev 1993; 1995a: 83–84). Some role in the process of the transition of the dominant position from the internal Lowlands to the Highlands was certainly played by the transfer of the main incense trade routes from land to sea. This must have caused a considerable decline in the economic importance of the edge of the ayhad desert (Ryckmans J. 1951: 331; Bowen 1958a: 35; Irvine 1973: 301; Robin 1982a, I: 98; 1982b: 17; 1984: 212; Crone 1987: 23–36; Audouin, Breton, Robin 1988: 74 &c). Quite a significant role may have also been played by the processes of the Arabian aridization (see for example Fedele 1988: 36; Robin 1991e: 63; 1991f: 88). But the most important factor seems to have been the silting of the irrigation

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<sup>1</sup> My deepest gratitude goes to G. Rex Smith for his help with the preparation of the English version of a part of this text.

<sup>2</sup> I have tried to present their description and analysis in: Korotayev 1993 ; 1995a: 79–81.

<sup>3</sup> The main role here seems to have belonged to the Sabaean center; however, the role of the Qatabanian center also seems to have been rather important (especially in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC – see *e.g.* von Wissmann 1968). The Minaean-Madhabian center also appears to have exerted considerable cultural influence on certain areas of the Highlands (see *e.g.* C 609; von Wissmann 1964a: 319, 343–344, 355; Robin 1982a, I: 48–49; Bafaqih 1988 &c).

systems.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the situation in the Lowlands became similar to an ecological catastrophe (Serjeant 1960: 583; Piotrovskiy, Piotrovskaya 1984: 107; Robin 1984: 220–221; 1991f: 88; Sauer *et al.* 1988: 102).<sup>5</sup>

With respect to the Sabaeen cultural-political area the situation can be also described in the following words: several factors mentioned above caused a significant decline of the Sabaeen state and civilization by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC.<sup>6</sup> The weakening state organization seems to have become incapable of providing guarantees of life and property to individuals, and it was the clan organization that took on these functions to a considerable extent.<sup>7</sup>

Though the Sabaeen state, which seems to have found itself on the brink of the complete collapse at the end of the Ancient Period, in the late 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, considerably reconsolidated during the Middle Period (in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD), it remained rather weak, especially in comparison with the Ancient Sabaeen state. Indeed, the inscriptions witness to the existence of quite a strong state organization in the center of the early Sabaeen Commonwealth. For example, this relatively developed state apparatus let the Sabaeen *mukarribs* erect dozens of various buildings (irrigation structures, temples, city walls &c) in many parts of the Commonwealth.<sup>8</sup> We know relatively much about the Ancient Sabaeen civil officials who could be appointed (*s<sup>2</sup>ym*) to organize certain constructions or to be in charge of a certain city &c.<sup>9</sup>

In a sharp contrast with the relatively scanty Ancient epigraphy the numerous Middle Sabaeen inscriptions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD give us almost no information of this kind.<sup>10</sup> In general, the Middle «Sabaeen» inscriptions do not witness to the existence of almost any specific features of the regular state in the

<sup>4</sup> It seems to be partly caused by the degradation of the natural plant cover of the Western slopes of the Yemeni Mountains due both to the anthropogenic factors and the probable climatic change (*e.g.* Robin 1991f: 88).

<sup>5</sup> In addition, it might be reasonable to mention as one of its likely causes «an increase in the saline content of the soils and clays due to centuries of intensive irrigation» comparable to the well-known Mesopotamian case (Sauer *et al.* 1988: 107).

<sup>6</sup> For example, direct evidence for the dramatic decline of the Sabaeen state at the end of the Ancient Period has been recently found by Robin in the materials of the German Archaeological Expedition in Marib (Robin 1989b: 222); see also *e.g.* Pirenne 1956: 174–178; von Wissmann 1968: 10 &c.

<sup>7</sup> It is almost a rule that in agrarian societies the weakening of the state organization causes the consolidation of the clan structures (for more detail see [Korotayev, Obolonkov] 1989; 1990).

<sup>8</sup> C 366 a; b; 367 + Lu 16; 490; 622; 623; 627; 629; 631; 632 a; b; 634; 636; 957; Ga 46 [Ga MM]; Gl 1122 + 1116 + 1120; 1558 [= MAFRAY-al-Asahil 6]; 1560 [= MAFRAY-al-Asahil 5]; 1561; 1567 [= MAFRAY-ad-Durayb 3]; A 710; 775 [MAFRAY-Hirbat Sa'ud 4]; 776 [= MAFRAY Hirbat Sa'ud 2]; 777 [= MAFRAY-Hirbat Sa'ud 8]; MAFRAY-al-Asahil 2; 3; 7; -Hirbat Sa'ud 6; 10; Ph 133 [= MAFRAY-al-Asahil 1]; R 3943; 3945; 3946; 3948 [= Gl 1550 = MAFRAY-ad-Durayb 4]; 3949; 3950; 4399; 4401; 4429; 4494; 4844 [= MAFRAY-Hirbat Sa'ud 1]; 4850 [= MAFRAY-Hirbat Sa'ud 3]; 4904 [= Gl 1559 = MAFRAY-al-Asahil 4]; 4906; 5096 &c.

<sup>9</sup> C 375 [= Ja 550]; 439; 494; 496 [= MAFRAY-Hirbat Sa'ud 13]; 566; Ja 552; 555; 557; MAFRAY-al-Balaq-al-Janubi 1 [= Gl 1719 + 1717 + 1718]; R 4428; 4635; 4845 bis; Ry 584; Sh 20 &c; see also Ryckmans 1951, 62–64, 83, 85, 88–90, 92; Audouin, Breton, Robin 1988: 74–76 &c.

<sup>10</sup> This fact has been already noticed by J. Ryckmans (1951: 62–64, 175–176).

Middle Sabaean cultural-political area, neither a regular civil administration nor a regular system of taxation<sup>11</sup> nor an artificial administrative-territorial division. The silence of the sources does not seem to be fortuitous, as the Middle Sabaean political system did not really need these institutions. This system appears to have consisted of the weak state in its center and strong autonomous chiefdoms (*sha'bs* of the second order) on its periphery. The only really well attested obligation of these *sha'bs* was to provide military service (*s'w'*) to their kings. However, this apparently very loose system turned out to work very effectively.

In any case, there are serious grounds to suppose that by the end of the Ancient Period the Sabaean state had significantly weakened and notwithstanding its partial reconsolidation during the Middle Period it had never regained the strength it had in the Earliest Subperiod (in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC). As a result we can see by the Middle Period the consolidation of the clan organization (see in addition to Chapter VIII of the present monograph *e.g.* Korotayev 1995a) which acted as a partial substitute for the weak state and remained really strong during the whole of the Middle Period (Korotayev 1993a; b; c; 1994a; c; d; 1995a; b; 1996 and Part 1 of the present monograph).

As has been mentioned above, the Middle Sabaean political system may be characterized as consisting of a weak state in its center and strong chiefdoms on its periphery. However, there is no doubt that this was a real *system*, i.e. it had properties which could not be reduced to the characteristics of its elements.<sup>12</sup> It should be also taken into consideration that the state and chiefdoms were not the *only* elements of this political system. It included as well, for example, a sub-system of temple centers<sup>13</sup> and the civil community of Marib,<sup>14</sup> as well as some true tribes (not chiefdoms) in the area of the Sabaean Lowlands (primarily the tribes of the Amirite confederation – see *e.g.* von Wissmann 1964a; Robin 1991f;

<sup>11</sup> Though, if Kitchen's interpretation of line 16 of Shib'anu 1 (Kitchen 1995) is correct, this inscription may be considered as evidence for existence of some kind of regular taxation in some parts of the Sabaean cultural area after its final subjugation by the Himyarite kings in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. It does not appear completely unlikely taking into consideration the much higher degree of the political centralization of the Himyarite kingdom (see below) and the fact that the Himyarite kings tried to establish some kind of a similar centralized regular state administration in the Sabaean cultural-political area.

<sup>12</sup> It does not seem productive either to consider the Middle Sabaean cultural-political area as an agglomerate of political units, like an alliance of states, or tribes: the level of the political integration of this entity was rather high, quite comparable to that of an average early state. Hence, this entity must be considered as belonging to the same level of political integration as *e.g.* early state rather than an alliance of early states.

<sup>13</sup> There is no doubt that the Middle «Sabaean» temples had important political functions; however, the level of their autonomy appears to have been normally very high, and by no means could they be described as integral parts of the administrative sub-systems of the Middle «Sabaean» state and chiefdoms (see Chapter V of the present monograph, or *e.g.* Korotayev 1995d).

<sup>14</sup> It does not appear reasonable to characterize this civil community either as a «chiefdom», or as a true «tribe». There are also some grounds to suppose the existence of autonomous civil communities in Nashq and Nashshan. The *sha'b* of *irwah* also seems to have had some evident features of the civil community (see especially Ja 2856).

1992b &c). With the transition from the Ancient to the Middle Period the Sabaeen political system was essentially transformed, becoming as a whole very different from the «state», but remaining, however, on basically the same level of political complexity. Without losing any political complexity and sophistication, the Middle «Sabaeans» managed to solve in quite different ways the problems which in complex societies are normally solved by states, such as the mobilization of resources for the functioning of the governing sub-system, territorial organization of a vast space and the provision of guarantees of life and property.

The Middle «Sabaeen» experience seems to demonstrate that an integrated territorial entity (even when it is considerably large, complex and highly developed in comparison with *e.g.* an average chiefdom) need not necessarily be organized politically as a state. This appears to show that for the «early state» (in Claessen's sense of this term [see Claessen, Skalnik 1978]) the transition to the «mature state» or complete «degeneration» into «tribes» and «chiefdoms» were not the only possible ways of evolution. One of the possible alternatives was its transformation into a «political system of the Middle Sabaeen type». The real processes of political evolution seem to have been actually much less «unilinear» than is sometimes supposed.<sup>15</sup>

This impression appears to be emphasized by the fact that a significant transformation seems to have occurred in the area in the Early Islamic Period (see *e.g.* Robin 1982a; 1982b; [Piotrovskiy] 1985; Dresch 1989: 191),<sup>16</sup> and by the late Middle Ages the political system of the former «Sabaeen» region seems to have consisted mainly of a bit stronger state in its center and true tribes (not chiefdoms) on its periphery.<sup>17</sup> Within this system the tribes and state constituted one well integrated whole (Stookey 1978: 79–95, 171–173; Obermeyer 1982; [Piotrovskiy] 1985: 70, 97–100; [Gerasimov] 1987: 45–55; Dresch 1984b; 1989; Abu Ghanim 1985: 98–138; 1990; vom Bruck 1993 &c). There does not seem to be any adequate term to denote systems of this kind.

It might be reasonable to apply here some term like a «multiplicity», defining it as a highly integrated system consisting of heterogeneous polities (*e.g.* of state and

<sup>15</sup> See also, *e.g.*, Kradin *et al.* 2000; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000; Grinin *et al.* 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Thus, according to Dresch in al-Hamdani's time (the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD) «Upper Yemen may well have been in a state of transition from a quasi-feudal system to the tribal one» (Dresch 1989: 191); similar conclusions have been produced by Gochenour (1984a: 36ff.).

<sup>17</sup> In the meantime in the Southern Highlands (in the former Himyarite area) there persisted more regular state structures (see *e.g.* Burrowes 1987: 9; Dresch 1989: 8–15, 192; Obermeyer 1982: 31–32; Stookey 1978: 50, 124; Weir 1991: 87–88; Wenner 1967: 38 &c). I would emphasize that the state organization in the Southern Highlands was already significantly stronger and more regular than in the North in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD (see *e.g.* C 448 + Ga 16 [Hakir 1]; R 4230; Bafaqih, Robin 1980: 15; Robin 1981b: 338; Bafaqih 1994; Korotayev 1995a), whereas in that period in the North we find a much stronger clan organization (Chapter VIII of the present monograph; see also *e.g.* Korotayev 1993c: 51–53, 56; 1995 a: Chapters I, III).

chiefdoms, or state and tribes).<sup>18</sup> The following reservation seems to be necessary here: the medieval political system of North-East Yemen (as well as the Middle Sabaeen political system [the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD]) included in addition to state and tribes (of course, not chiefdoms as it was in the Middle Sabaeen case) some other important elements. It seems sufficient to mention here the «religious aristocracy» (*sayyid/sadah*), tracing their descent to Muhammad, and performing in the tribal areas *e.g.* important mediating political roles, as usual without occupying there any formal political functions and remaining mainly outside the tribal (and in many cases state) hierarchy (Serjeant 1977; Chelhod 1970a: 80–81; 1975: 70–71; 1979: 58f.; Gerholm 1977: 123; Stookey 1978: 95; Obermeyer 1982: 36–37; Dresch 1984b: 159f.; 1989: 140–145; Abu Ghanim 1985: 212–227; 1990). Within the medieval North-East Yemen political system the *sayyids* appear to have taken some functions of the pre-Islamic (or, to be more correct, pre-monotheistic) system of temple centers, on the one hand, and ones of the *qayls*, on the other (though, unlike the *qayls*, the political leaders of the pre-Islamic *sha'b*, the *sayyids* in most cases did not act as formal political leaders of the North Yemen *qabilah*). «The true source of political power lies with the tribal leaders who will accept no control from their peers. The solution to this impasse was worked out even prior to Islam by the evolution of the organization centered upon the sacred enclave, managed by an hereditary religious aristocracy respected and protected by the tribes» (Serjeant 1977: 244).

There does not seem to be any grounds to consider this transformation as «degeneration», «regress» or «decline», as there was no significant loss of the general system complexity and elaboration, one complex political system was transformed into another one, structurally different, but not less complex, highly organized and sophisticated.

It appears possible to present some argument in support of the interpretation of *e.g.* the transformation of the pre-Islamic «Sabaeen»<sup>19</sup>  $s^2 \cdot b^n HS^2 D^n$  into the

<sup>18</sup> There does not seem to be any ground to consider the multiplicity as a local South Arabian phenomenon. Extra-South-Arabian examples of multipolities of the North Yemeni Zaydi type («state + tribes») could be easily found *e.g.* in the Middle East of the last two centuries (see *e.g.* Evans-Pritchard 1949; Eickelman 1981: 85–104; Tapper 1983; Al-Rasheed 1994 &c); the extra-Yemen examples of the multipolities of the Middle Sabaeen type («state + chiefdoms [+ 'independent' communities]») could be easily found again in the Middle East (where a considerable number of the so-called tribes are rather chiefdoms in Service's terminology [Service 1971 /1962/: 144; Johnson, Earle 1987: 238–243 &c]). Outside the Middle East this type of the multiplicity can be found *e.g.* in Western Africa (the Benin Kingdom in some periods of its history – Bondarenko 1994; [Bondarenko] 1995, and perhaps some other West African «kingdoms» [Service 1971 /1962/: 144]). Of course, two above-mentioned types of multipolities do not exhaust all their possible types. *E.g.* none of them seems to be appropriate with respect to the «State of the Saints» of the Central Atlas, whose periphery consisted of tribes, but whose center can be characterized neither as a state, nor as a chiefdom, nor as a tribe (Gellner 1969).

<sup>19</sup> It is necessary to mention that the Sabaeans ( $S^1 B^1$ ) were only one of the *sha'bs* belonging to the Sabaeen cultural-political area. The members of all the other *sha'bs* (like Hashid, Bakil, Ghayman, irwah &c) of this area are **never** denoted as «Sabaeans» ( $S^1 B^n$ ) in the original texts. So to distinguish the «Sabaeans», the inhabitants of the area most of whom were not Sabaeans and who would have been never denoted as such in the inscriptions, and the Sabaeans proper (the members of the *sha'b* Saba' who would be denoted as Sabaeans,  $S^1 B^1$ ,  $S^1 B^n$  in the inscriptions) it might be reasonable to designate the former as «Sabaeans» (in quotation marks) and the latter as Sabaeans

Medieval (and Modern) *qabilat Hashid* as a transformation of a chiefdom into a tribe (or tribal confederation). Of course the notions of *tribe* and *chiefdom* are considerably polysemantic. This is especially true with respect to the notion of tribe, which is used by some scholars to denote certain entities well covered by the definition of chiefdom. This is true *e.g.* with respect to Malinowski's notion of *tribe-state* (Malinowski 1947: 259–261; see also *e.g.* Sahlins 1968: 20–21;

[Popov] 1982: 75; on the misleading interchangeable use of the notions *tribe* and *chiefdom* see Fried 1975: 60–65, 88–98). Within such an approach, of course, the Middle «Sabaean» *sha'b* of the second order may well be denoted as a *tribe*.

As it was introduced into the scientific circulation by Service (in 1962, in the first edition of the *Primitive Social Organization* [Service 1962]), the notion of *chiefdom* was quite clearly delimited from the *tribe*. However, later this term also began to acquire more and more polysemy approaching closer and closer to the notion of tribe (as it was defined by Service) in the work by some scholars (see *e.g.* Sahlins 1968: 20–21; Renfrew 1974 &c).

However, the «terminological famine» in the modern palaeosociology is to my mind so strong that to use the notions of *tribe* and *chiefdom* synonymously would be an impermissible luxury. Yet, if we decide to use these notions to denote two different forms of political organization, a certain priority should be given to the criteria of their difference proposed by the scholar who introduced the notion of *chiefdom* into the wide scientific circulation. I mean, of course, Elman R. Service (Service 1971 [1962]: 133–169).

However, one have to admit that, unfortunately, Service does not give any really rigorous definitions of both the tribe and the chiefdom. Yet he proposes some clear criteria using which one can differentiate between these two forms of political organization.

Thus, how does Service define the main differences between the political organization of the tribe and the chiefdom? The political organization of the tribe is described in the following way:

«Leadership is personal ... and for special purposes only in tribal society; there are no political offices containing real power, and a 'chief' is merely a man of influence, a sort of adviser. The means of tribal consolidation for collective action are therefore not governmental... Tribe... is composed of economically self-sufficient residential groups which because of the absence of higher authority take unto themselves the private right

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(without quotation marks). Hence, for example «the Sabaean clans» would mean «clans affiliated to *sha'b Saba'*«, like HZFR<sup>m</sup>, GDN<sup>m</sup>, 'TKL<sup>n</sup>, MQR<sup>m</sup> &c; whereas «the 'Sabaean' clans» will denote all the clans of this area including non-Sabaean clans of Humlan, Hashid, irwah, Ghayman &c. «The Sabaean Lowlands» (with respect to the Middle Period) would mean the part of the interior Yemeni Lowlands mainly populated by the Sabaeans, the areas of Marib, Nashq and Nashshan, whereas «the 'Sabaean' Highlands» denote the region of the Yemeni Highlands mainly populated by non-Sabaeans, but constituting an integral part of the Sabaean cultural-political area. Yet as such a convention does not exist at present I have to continue the current tradition of denoting all the inhabitants of the Sabaean cultural-political area as Sabaeans.

to protect themselves. Wrongs to individuals are punished by the corporate group, the 'legal person'. Disputes in tribal society tend to generate feuds between groups»<sup>20</sup> (Service 1971 [1962]: 103).

Nevertheless it appears necessary (in order to avoid an undesirable synonymy) to add to what was described by Service such a criterion as the «supracommunity» of the tribal organization – the above-mentioned type of political organization can only be reasonably designated as *tribal* proper if it covers more than a single community, otherwise we shall simply deal with just one of the possible types of the communal organization. Here I agree completely with the following statement of Fried:

«...An essential element of the concept of tribe [is] transcendence of the individual community and, *pari passu*, that tribalism [consists] in functions aggregating otherwise discrete villages into an interacting whole» (Fried 1975: 39).

The actual usage of the notion of *tribe* by Service does not contradict this (Service 1971 [1962]: 99–132), though he has not described this criterion in a quite clear way.

The socio-political organization of the *chiefdom* is characterized by Service as follows:

«The great change at the chiefdom level is that specialization and redistribution are no longer merely adjunctive to a few particular endeavours, but continuously characterize a large part of the activity of the society. Chiefdoms are REDISTRIBUTIONAL SOCIETIES with a permanent central agency of coordination» (Service 1971 [1962]: 134). «When chieftainship becomes a permanent OFFICE in the structure of society social inequality becomes characteristic of the society, followed finally by inequality in consumption... The creation of the hereditary office of chief, with its high status for the person who occupies it, naturally carries the possibility of other statuses of high degree... A chief's high status raises the status of every member of his family above ordinary families, and ultimately that of the families in his local kin group to some extent... A chief necessarily has a 'nobility', even though they are only his own family... A further important feature lies in the chief's ability to plan, organize, and

<sup>20</sup> It seems necessary to stress that, speaking logically, what should be treated as an essential characteristic of the tribal *organization* is not the conflicts between the residential groups (which is completely normal as well for the primitive societies lacking any specifically tribal organization (they are considered by Service to belong to «the band level of sociocultural integration» [*Ibid.*: 46–98]), but the fact that the tribal organization puts certain limits to such conflicts, makes the feuding parties conflict according to certain rules, provides to the parties highly developed mechanisms of mediation &c, quite often effectively blocking the most disintegrating consequences of such conflicts, but without the alienation of the resident group «sovereignty» (actually Service speaks about this on the pages which follow this quotation, though, to my mind, without the necessary clarity). It seems also essential to stress that the situation described by Service may not be necessarily connected only with the complete absence of any supra-tribal political structures («higher authority»), but also with their weakness (as is attested with respect to the most tribes of the Middle East); whereas their weakness in many «tribal areas» could be often partly caused by the effectiveness of the tribal organization which makes it frequently possible for the quite developed population to live without any strong state structures.

deploy public labour» (*Ibidem*: 139–140). «A chiefdom is in a sense pyramidal or cone-shaped in structure...» (*Ibidem*: 142).<sup>21</sup>

Finally, Service describes directly some important differences between the chiefdom and the tribe:

«...A chiefdom differs radically from a tribe or band not only in economic and political organization but in the matter of social rank – ... tribes are egalitarian, chiefdoms are profoundly inegalitarian» (*Ibidem*). «The most distinctive characteristic of chiefdoms as compared to tribes ... is ... the pervasive inequality of persons and groups in the society. It begins with the status of chief as he functions in the system of redistribution. Persons are then ranked above others according to their genealogical nearness to him. Concepts involving prescriptions, proscriptions, sumptuary laws, marriage rules and customs, genealogical conceptions, and etiquette in general combine to create and perpetuate this sociopolitical ordering, and in turn have an effect on social structure and status terminology and etiquette behaviour. A charismatic ephemeral leader of the type found in tribes ... has the functions and attributes that result from his own capabilities.<sup>22</sup> An 'office', on the other hand, is a position in a sociopolitical structure that has ascribed functions and conventional attributes no matter who occupies it» &c (*Ibidem*: 145–146).

It is quite evident that the Middle Sabaean *sha'ab* of the second order comes rather well under the definition of the chiefdom by Service<sup>23</sup> (though, naturally, not without certain reservations), whereas the Islamic Yemeni *qabilah* corresponds as well to Service's description of the «ideal» tribal organization (though, again, not without some reservations).

Robin has already pointed out to the qualitative difference between the position of the *shaykhs* of the modern Yemeni tribes and the one of the *qayls* of the Middle Sabaean *sha'abs* (Robin 1982a, I: 83–85). Indeed, the North Yemeni *shaykh* is *primus inter pares* (Obermeyer 1982: 36; Dresch 1984a; 1984b: 156–

<sup>21</sup> The socio-political organization of the chiefdom is described in a very similar way by most of the other political anthropologists: Friedman, Rowlands 1977; [Vasilyev] 1980; Earle 1987; Carneiro 1981; 1991 &c.

<sup>22</sup> It is quite difficult not to notice that the description of the «ideal» tribal leader by Service resembles rather closely the modern description of the position of the *shaykhs* among the Yemeni *qaba'il*: «A *shaykh* cannot ... make undertakings on his men's behalf simply on the basis of his formal position; each undertaking which affects them must be specifically agreed to...» (Dresch 1984a: 39). «The power which a *shaykh* may have over groups of tribesmen is not conferred on him by his position. He must constantly intervene in their affairs, and intervene successfully» [in order to preserve his power] (*Ibid.*, 41; see also Chelhod 1970a; 1979; 1985: 39–54; Dostal 1974; 1990: 47–58, 175–223; Obermeyer 1982; Dresch 1984b; 1989; Abu Ghanim 1985; 1990: 229–251; vom Bruck 1993: 94–95 &c).

<sup>23</sup> The Middle Sabaean *sha'ab* of the second order seems to correspond similarly well to the definitions of the chiefdoms by the other scholars, e.g. «an autonomous political unit comprising a number of villages or communities under the permanent control of a paramount chief» (Carneiro 1981: 45); «an intermediate form of political structure that already has a centralized administration and a hereditary hierarchy of rulers and nobility, where social and property inequality is present, but that still lacks a formal and all the more legalized apparatus of coercion» ([Vasilyev] 1980: 182). See also Earle's definition of the chiefdom presented below.



157; 1989: 38–116; Abu Ghanim 1985: 115–133, 209–212, 259–266; vom Bruck 1993: 94–95 &c), whereas the Middle Sabaean *qayls* were separated from the ordinary members of the *sha'bs* by an enormous social distance. E.g. the relations between the *qayls* and their *sha'b* are normally expressed in the '*dm* – '*mr*', «the subjects – the lords», categories; these very categories were also applied to the relations between clients and patrons, subjects and the King, people and deities (in R 3910 the singular absolute form for '*dm* [*'bd<sup>m</sup>*] is even used to denote the slaves sold in the Marib market – for detail see e.g. Korotayev 1995b). In most Middle Sabaean inscriptions authored by the ordinary members of the Middle Sabaean *sha'bs* they beg the deities to grant them the benevolence (*h y w-r w*) of their lords, the *qayls* (and sometimes even ask them to protect the dedicants against their lords' wrath [*lyt* – e.g. C 352, 16]). Of course, such a style of relations between leaders and commoners appears to be almost inconceivable for the modern (and medieval) North Yemeni tribes.

It seems rather remarkable that the term *sayyid*, «lord», which even in the Early Islamic period was used to denote heads of the tribes ( [Piotrovskiy] 1985: 77; Dresch 1989: 169, 191–192), later was completely forced out in the North Yemen by a much more neutral *shaykh*, «old man», whereas the use of the term *sayyid* was restricted to denote only the members of the «religious aristocracy» placed in the tribal zone of the North Yemeni multiplicity mainly outside the tribal organization, under the tribal protection, but not above the tribes.

I would like to stress that there does not seem to be any grounds to consider the transformation North-East Yemeni chiefdoms into tribes as «degeneration», «regress» or «decline», as there was no significant loss of the general system complexity and elaboration, one complex political system was transformed into another one, structurally different, but not less complex, highly organized and sophisticated.

It seems necessary, however to mention also at least the most important of the reservations concerning the identification of the Yemeni *qabilah* and the *tribe* as defined by Service.

The political organization of the Yemeni *qaba'il* is relatively<sup>24</sup> egalitarian. However, the North-East Yemen tribal system as a whole in no way can be considered as egalitarian. The point is that in addition to the members of the tribes (constituting in the tribal areas the majority of the population and the main mass of the plough agriculturalists) the tribal communities include numerous «quasi-casts»<sup>25</sup> of unarmed<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> First of all with respect to the Middle Sabaean *sha'b*.

<sup>25</sup> A certain similarity between the South Arabian and Indian traditional systems of the socio-cultural stratification has already attracted the scholars' attention (e.g. Chelhod 1970a: 83; 1979: 59). However, they also stress some essential differences between these two systems (Chelhod 1970a: 83; 1979: 59; 1985: 33; Dresch 1989: 153; [Rodionov] 1994, 42).

<sup>26</sup> Excluding the traditional Yemeni dagger (*janbiyyah*): practically all the Northern Yemenis (including the *u'afa'*) have it, but the weak must place it firmly to the left, unlike the members of tribes (*qabiliyyin*), wearing their daggers straight at the front of their belts (Chelhod 1970a: 75; 1979: 55; Stevenson 1985: 44; Dresch 1989: 38, 120; vom Bruck 1993: 92–93). The only exception here is

«weak» population, placed outside the tribal organization, but «under protection» of the tribes ( *u'afa'*, «the weak»);<sup>27</sup> butchers and barbers (*mazayinah*), the tribal «heralds» (*dawashin*), merchants (*bayya'in*), horticulturalists (*ghashshamin*), craftsman, first of all weavers (*ani'in*), servants (*akhdam*), placed at the very bottom of the hierarchy &c; traditionally the Jewish population of the area also belonged to «the weak» (Serjeant 1977; Chelhod 1970a: 63, 73–80, 83–84; 1975: 76–82; 1979: 48, 54–57; 1985: 15–37; Obermeyer 1982: 36; [Piotrovskiy] 1985: 64, 87; Dresch 1984b: 159; 1989: 117–123; Stevenson 1985: 42–47, 63f.; Abu Ghanim 1985: 234–249 &c).<sup>28</sup> The general picture of the social stratification of the tribal areas is further complicated by the presence of the above-mentioned *sayyids* and (not yet mentioned) *qa'is* (the learnt families, not tracing their descent to Muhammad), who were also under the protection of the tribes,<sup>29</sup> playing quite important roles in the functioning of the tribal systems<sup>30</sup> (Serjeant 1977; Chelhod 1970: 81f.; 1975: 70–71;

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a rather special «weak» quasi-cast, *dawashin* (the tribal «heralds»), who wear their *janbiyyahs* like the tribesmen (Dresch 1989: 120; and in addition to that *dawashin* traditionally carried lances – *ibid.*: 406). The *sayyids* and *qa'is* wear their *janbiyyahs* on the right – (which seems to signify quite correctly their special position in the tribal world – Chelhod 1970a: 75; 1979: 55; Dresch 1989: 136; vom Bruck 1993: 92; in addition to that, «*le poignard porté par le descendant du Prophète ... est généralement plus décoratif*» [vom Bruck 1993: 92]).

<sup>27</sup> It seems reasonable to stress that the «protection» provided to the «weak» population by the tribes is in no way an empty word. The failure of the tribe to defend a «weak» person under their protection (*e.g.* to secure the payment of fine for an offense committed against him) constitutes a very strong blow upon the reputation (*sharaf*, «honour») of the tribe, whereas the amount of such a compensation often exceeds four-fold (and sometimes [though very rarely] eleven-fold) the fine for a similar offense committed against a tribesman (Dresch 1989: 118, 407). In addition to that, «the call to right wrongs committed against them will generally be answered by large numbers of men from the tribe in question, whereas the call to support a fellow tribesman may be far less compelling» (Dresch 1984b: 159; see also *e.g.* Obermeyer 1982: 36). Also «it's forbidden for a person of superior rank to tease the '*ana il* (one of the designations of the «weak» – A.K.) or to wrong them. If such a thing happened then the whole society would take their side to obtain justice from their oppressor» (Chelhod 1979: 55; 1970a: 75; see also *e.g.* Stevenson 1985: 44).

<sup>28</sup> The formation of this system of the «quasi-casts» might be dated to the 12<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries ( [Piotrovskiy] 1985: 87).

<sup>29</sup> There appears to be a certain similarity in the tribal zone in the position of the «weak quasi-casts», on the one hand, and that of the *sayyids* and *qa'is*, on the other: both are under the protection of the tribes, which virtually have the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence. However, the Yemenis themselves make such a comparison extremely rarely: «*Dawashin* in both Dhu Muhammad and Dhu Husayn claim ... to be *hijrah* [under the special protection by the tribes – A.K.], 'because we are all *bi-l-muhaddash* (protected by an eleven-fold fine) like the *qa'is* and *sayyids*'... On the plateau I have not heard either tribesmen or *dawashin* suggest such equivalence between 'heralds' and men of religion...» (Dresch 1989: 407).

<sup>30</sup> «Non-tribal quasi-casts» of the North Yemen tribal zone constituted the minority of its population («Outside the few towns ... the weak people are not numerous, two or three families in a village of thirty tribal families is not unusual» [Dresch 1989: 123]). However, it is completely necessary to take them here into account, as they were one of the most important factors making the North Yemen tribal world what it was – a very complex and highly organized (and by no means «primitive») system, quite comparable according to its complexity with most pre-industrial state systems with a similar size of population (*e.g.* with the non-tribal state systems of the Yemen South Highlands and Lowlands).

1979: 58f.; Obermeyer 1982: 36–37; [Piotrovskiy] 1985: 65, 87, 101; Dresch 1984b: 159f.; 1989: 136–157; Abu Ghanim 1985: 212–227; 1990 &c).<sup>31</sup>

In many respects the tribe of the North Yemeni type could be regarded as a rather developed form of the political organization, whose complexity could quite be compared with that of the chiefdom (and it is by no means more primitive than the chiefdom), implying first of all a very high level of the development of the political culture and the existence of an elaborated system of the political institutions and the traditions of arbitration, mediation, search for consensus &c, a wide developed network of intensive intercommunal links on enormous territories populated by tens and hundreds thousand people. Such tribal system can to a certain extent organize (without the application of any centralized coercion) all these masses of population which often exceed the population of an average chiefdom by 1–2 orders of magnitude.

For example, Earle defines the chiefdom as «a polity that organizes centrally a regional population in thousands» (Earle 1991: 1); whereas an average North Yemen tribe includes 20–30 thousand members (Dresch 1984a: 33), and such a relatively highly integrated North Yemen tribal confederation as Hashid consists of seven tribes (*Ibid.*; Chelhod even lists 14 tribes belonging to this confederation – Chelhod 1970a: 84–85; 1985: 57–58; see also Stevenson 1985: 48). Of course, one should not forget either dozens of thousands of the members of the «weak quasi-casts» (as well as quite considerable numbers of *sayyids* and *qa is*) who are not formally members of the tribes, but who are also to a certain extent organized by the tribal structures (which *e.g.* guarantee the security of towns, markets, religious centers &c within the tribal area). As a result the mass of the population organized to a certain extent by the tribal confederation Hashid appears to exceed substantially (by 1–2 orders of magnitude!) the respective figures for an average chiefdom. In addition to this one should not forget the ability of the tribal organization of this type to form in conjunction with other polities (not necessarily states – see *e.g.* Gellner 1969) political systems, multipolities, with the complexity of even a higher order.

<sup>31</sup> The *sayyids* and *qa is* themselves considered their status to be higher than that of the tribesmen, though there do not seem to be sufficient grounds to regard them as the dominant strata of the North Yemeni tribes (*e.g.* Dresch 1984b: 159; 1989: 136–157). In the tribal zone the monopoly to apply violence actually belonged to the tribesmen and not *sayyids*. Notwithstanding the *sayyids*' very high reputation, these were the *shaykhs* and not *sayyids* who acted as real political leaders of the tribe (the latter became *shaykhs* rather rarely, whereas most *sayyids* do not seem to have really sought this; according to Dresch's observations, «there is no reason why someone who happens to be a *sayyid* should not also be a *shaykh*, although this is unusual» [Dresch 1989: 156]). In these respects the relations between the *sayyids* and the tribesmen resemble to a certain extent the ones between the brahmans and kshatriyas in ancient India (cp. *e.g.* [Bongard-Levin, Ilyin] 1985: 301–304). At the meantime it is rather evident that the presence of the *sayyid* families (having a high reputation among the tribes, but not dominant over them) in the tribal zone must have been a powerful integrating factor within the North Yemeni multipolity whose state center was headed for most of this millennia by the representatives of the «religious aristocracy» (*sayyids*), the Zaydi imams (*e.g.* Stookey 1978: 95, 149–155; Chelhod 1985: 26–29).

The notion of «tribe», as it is used by the social anthropologists for the description of the socio-political organization of the Northern Yemenis (or, say, the population of many areas of Afghanistan, Cyrenaica, Atlas &c) in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries appears rather useful, as it denotes quite a distinct form of supra-communal political organization, which does not seem to be adequately denoted by any other current terms, like «chiefdom» (let alone «state», or «community»). We can observe here such a type of political organization, when the functioning of quite stable forms of intercommunal integration takes place without the monopolization by the tribal leaders of the legitimate application of violence, without their acquisition of any formal power over the communities and the commoners, when *e.g.* the conflicts are solved (or the collective «tribal» actions are undertaken) not through the decisions of authoritative officials, but through the search by the tribal leaders (lacking any formal, absolute, independent from their personal qualities, power) for the consensus among all the interested members of the tribe (or the tribes) &c.

Thus, it transpires that political structures of the Yemeni *qaba'il* type<sup>32</sup> can be most appropriately denoted as «tribes», whereas the Middle Sabaean (the 1<sup>st</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD) supra-communal entities, the *sha'bs* of the second order could be with complete justification denoted as «chiefdoms». In the meantime within such an approach one would have to admit the absence of the tribal organization proper in the Sabaean Cultural Area of the pre-Islamic age.<sup>33</sup> That is why there are certain grounds to speak about the transformation of the chiefdoms into tribes in the «Sabaean» Highlands in the Early Islamic Period.

The approach considering the tribe as a relatively late, non-primitive form of political organization can in no way be regarded as new. In fact, as is well known, quite a similar conclusion was arrived at by Fried already in the 60s (Fried 1967; 1975). Indeed, Fried maintains that the tribe<sup>34</sup> is a non-primitive form of political organization which arose in relatively recent time under the structurizing impact of already formed state systems on unstructured (or extremely loosely structured) agglomerates of independent primitive communities.

While agreeing completely with Fried's approach to the tribe as a non-primitive late form of political organization, I am inclined to suppose (basing myself mainly on the South Arabian data) that there were some other ways in which the tribal organization could arise, *e.g.* through the transformation of the chiefdoms. Generally speaking, I would state that Fried seems to have a bit

<sup>32</sup> And not amorphous agglomerates of primitive communities, or such socio-political entities which can be adequately denoted as «communities» or «chiefdoms» (for a critical survey of cases of such a use of the term «tribe» see Fried 1975).

<sup>33</sup> At least in its highland part, as the semi-nomad population of al-Jawf (*e.g.* some part of the Amirites [ $s^2 \cdot b^n / s^2 \cdot b^n \cdot MR^m$ ]) might have already had tribal organization in the Middle Period (on the Amirites see *e.g.* Ghul 1959: 432; von Wissmann 1964a: 81–159; Bafaqih 1990: 282–283; Robin 1991f; Korotayev 1995e).

<sup>34</sup> Of course, if one understands «the tribe» as a distinct form of the supra-communal political integration, and does not use it as a synonym of «chiefdom», or «community».

overestimated the role of the structurizing influence of the state, almost completely refraining from the study of the internal dynamics of the evolution of the non-state political systems leading to the formation of the tribal organization.

I do not see any grounds to consider the formation of the North Yemen tribal organization as a result of the structurizing influence of the states on the unstructurized primitive population. Some significant influence was rather exerted on the part of the North Arab tribes, who were in close contact with South Arabia during all its late pre-Islamic and Early Islamic history (i.e. precisely in the period of the formation of the tribal organization in this area – [Piotrovskiy] 1985: 8, 64, 69–70; Chelhod 1970a: 69–72; 1979; 1985: 45–46; al-Hadithi 1978: 68, 81–96; Höfner 1959; Robin 1982b: 29; 1984: 213, 221; 1991f; Wilson 1989: 16; von Wissmann 1964a: 181–183, 195–196, 403–406; 1964b: 493 &c).

However, though the significant impact of the North Arabian tribes on the formation of the «tribal ethos» in the area appears very plausible (this will be discussed in more detail below), some of the above-mentioned scholars (Chelhod, Piotrovskiy, Robin) seem to underestimate the significance of the internal «logic» of the evolution of the area in this process.<sup>35</sup> To my mind, the genesis of the North Yemen tribal organization can be considered to a considerable extent as a realization of some long-term internal trends towards «egalitarization» which could be observed in the area since the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. It could be considered as a result of the prolonged search by the main agricultural population of the Northern Highlands for the optimum (for this area) forms of the socio-political organization.

It seems possible to detect some trends towards «egalitarization» already for the pre-Islamic age. For example, in the Ancient Period (the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC) of the Sabaeen history immovable property was considered to belong to heads of extended families (thus, a head of such a family would denote this property as «his» */-hw/* [Bauer/ 1964 : 19–20; 1965 : 209–217; Lundin 1962 ; 1965a; 1971: 233–245; Korotayev 1993c: 51–53; 1995a: Chapter III; and Chapter VIII of the present monograph]), whereas in the Middle Period (the 1<sup>st</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD) such property would be considered as belonging to the whole clan nucleus of the clan communities (and consequently in the Middle Sabaeen inscriptions [even installed by single authors] we get across only the mentions of «their» *[-hmw]* immovable property, but almost never «his» *[-hw]* lands, fields, vineyards &c – Korotayev 1993c; 1995a: Chapter III; and Chapter VIII of the present monograph). To my mind, this may be regarded as a result of certain «democratization» of internal organization of Sabaeen lineages.

The formation of the tribal organization in the Northern Highlands in the Islamic age seems to have been accompanied by the further «democratization» of the land relations, though in a very remarkable way, through the achievement of a very high level of their

<sup>35</sup> Cp. *e.g.* here much more cautious position of Dresch (Dresch 1989).

individualization (Dresch 1989). In this area the land relations appear to have passed the way from the possession of the extended family lands by their heads in the Ancient Sabaean Period (the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC) to the emphatically collective possession of the arable lands by whole lineages in the Middle Period (the 1<sup>st</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD) and further (it seems not without some influence of the *shari'ah*) towards the individual possession of the arable lands by all the adult members of the tribes (the women's land property rights need special consideration for which I have no space here [cf. Mundy 1979; Dresch 1989: 276–291]). The last transformation seems to correlate rather well with the genesis of the tribal organization and the general egalitarianization of the socio-political structures, as such a system of land relations effectively prevented the formation of anything like powerful qaylīte clans of the pre-Islamic age with their huge consolidated and indivisible land possessions. It is also rather remarkable that the genesis of the tribal organization in the Northern Highlands appears to have been accompanied by the weakening of the «economic communalism»: the Middle Sabaean inscriptions, whose authors constantly mention the assistance of their communities in their economic activities (C 224, 4; 339, 4; 416, 4; 585, 2; Ga 6, 3; R 3971, 4; 3975 + Ga 32, 3–4; 4033, 2a; Robin/ al-Hajari 1, 6; /Khamir 1, 4; /Kani 13+14, 2; Ry 540, 1–2 &c), stand in the sharpest contrast with the descriptions of the economic relations in the tribal Yemeni North characterized by an extremely low level of the communal economic co-operation: «The lack of co-operation in practice is perhaps not as marked as in stories told of the past, but it is still marked enough. Neighbours occupying adjoining houses or working adjoining plots may help one another gratuitously in time of trouble, usually, as Doughty put it, 'betwixt free will and their private advantage'; one would work to repair someone else's terrace if one's own terrace might be placed in some danger, for example, but hardly for long otherwise» (Dresch 1989: 301).

It is also very remarkable that a similar transformation occurred with respect to the title *qayl*: in the Ancient Period it was mainly an individual title, belonging to individual persons, whereas in the Middle Period in the Sabaean cultural-political area (but not in the Himyarite South!) it started to be considered as mainly an attribute of whole qaylīte clans, but not their individual members ( [Korotayev] 1990a: 8–12; Korotayev 1993c: 50–51; 1995a: Chapter I; see also Robin 1982a, I: 79 and Avanzini 1985: 86–87; and Chapter VIII of the present monograph). Notwithstanding the remaining great social distance between the qaylīte clans and the main mass of the members of the Middle Sabaean *sha'bs*, this transformation may well be considered as a step towards the North Yemeni tribal model (cp. Dresch 1984a).

It seems appropriate to mention here a rather democratic internal organization of the Middle Sabaean (the 1<sup>st</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD) local communities, the *sha'bs* of the third order, demonstrating some evident similarities with the communal organization of the population of the Yemeni Uplands of the current millennium (see Chapter I of the present monograph and e.g. Korotayev 1994b). The genesis of the North-East Yemen tribal organization can well be considered as the process of the extension of quite democratic principles of the Middle Sabaean communal organization to the supra-communal level (corresponding to the level of the Middle Sabaean *sha'b* of the second order).

The genesis of the North-East Yemen tribal organization can be also considered as a result of the protracted struggle of the main agricultural population of the Northern Highlands in order to raise their social status. This struggle seems to have been mainly rather «quite», and that is why it was noticed by the historical sources rather rarely (see, however, *e.g.* al-Hamdani 1980: 328). In any case there are certain grounds to suppose that the main mass of the North Highlands agricultural population used the political upheavals of the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD in order to raise significantly their social status.<sup>36</sup>

No doubt, a certain role in the formation of the high-status tribal agricultural population was played by the above-mentioned influence of the political culture of the North Arabian tribes. One of their most important contributions here appears to have been the transmission to the Arabian South of the «genealogical culture». The pre-Islamic South Arabian communities were *sha'bs*, emphatically territorial entities.

«In strong contrast to the North Arabian practice of recording long lists of ancestors (attested also for the pre-Islamic period in the Safaitic inscriptions), E[pigraphic] S[outh] A[rabian] nomenclature consisted simply of given-name plus name of the social grouping (usually the *bayt*), with optional insertion of the father's given-name, but never any mention of an ancestor in any higher degree. One is irresistibly reminded of the remark attributed to the caliph 'Umar, 'Learn your genealogies, and be not like the Nabataeans of Mesopotamia who, when asked who they are, say "I am from such-and-such a village", which Ibn Khaldun quotes with the very significant comment that it is true also of the populations of the fertile tracts of Arabia... [The] *qabila*... [is] fundamentally kinship-based and totally different in nature from the *sha'b*...In the Qur'an (49:13) *ja'alna-kum shu'ub<sup>an</sup> wa-qaba'il<sup>a</sup>* clearly refers to two different types of social organization, and Ibn Khaldun when speaking of the settled populations of Arabia is careful to use the word *shu'ub* and not *qaba'il*, reserving the latter for the nomads» (Beeston 1972a: 257–258; see also *Id.* 1972b: 543; Ryckmans 1974b: 500; Robin 1982a, I; 1982b; [Piotrovskiy] 1985: 53, 69 &c).

In the Early Islamic age under the influence of the North Arabian tribal culture which acquired the highest prestige in the Muslim World many South Arabian *sha'bs*, while remaining essentially territorial (Dresch 1989; Serjeant 1989: XI), were transformed into *qaba'il*, tribes structured formally according to genealogical principles.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, to some extent this transformation seems to have

<sup>36</sup> Whereas the political instability characteristic for South Arabia during most of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium helped them to preserve this high status. On the other hand, the Northern tribal population seems to have contributed significantly to the perpetuation of this political instability.

<sup>37</sup> It should be mentioned that the «qabilization» of some Sabaean *sha'bs* seems to have begun already before the Islamic Age. Here the most remarkable is the inscription Fa 74, dated (lines 6–12) to the month dhu-Madhra'an of year 614 of the Himyarite era, which corresponds to July AD 499, or 504. On its line 6 *S'B' KHL<sup>n</sup>* is denoted as '*s'rt*. It should be mentioned that *S'B' KHL<sup>n</sup>* was the «central» *sha'b* of the Sabaean cultural-political area (the temple-civil community of its capital, Marib), which already in the Middle Period (the 1<sup>st</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD) had a very special socio-political organization, quite different from the one of the other Sabaean *sha'bs* (Loundine 1973a; b;

also been the result of the intense work by the South Arabians aimed at the working out of their own genealogies, as well as their passionate (and quite successful) struggle for the recognition of their genealogies by the Arab World (and for integration in this way into the Arab ethnos dominant within the Early Islamic state [the 7<sup>th</sup> – the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries AD] in quite high positions – [Piotrovskiy] 1977; 1985).

One should not of course forget that the Yemenis managed to achieve very successfully something which almost nobody else did:

«With the conquests, the Arabs found themselves in charge of a huge non-Arab population. Given that it was non-Muslim, this population could be awarded a status similar to that of clients in Arabia, retaining its own organization under Arab control in return for the payment of taxes... But converts posed a novel problem in that, on the one hand they had to be incorporated, not merely accommodated, within Arab society; and on the other hand, they had 'FORGOTTEN THEIR GENEALOGIES',<sup>38</sup> suffered defeat and frequently also enslavement, so that they did not make acceptable *h alifs*; the only non-Arabs to be affiliated as such were the Hamra' and Asawira, Persian soldiers who deserted to the Arabs during the wars of conquest in return for privileged status... It was in response to this novel problem that Islamic *wala'* [i.e. the system of integration of the non-Arab Muslims into the Islamic society in capacity of the dependent *mawali* – A.K.] was evolved» (Crone 1991: 875).

In any case it is a bit amazing that such a highly-qualified specialist in early Islamic history as Crone has managed to overlook another (and much more important!) exception – the Yemenis (most of whom do not seem to have been Arabs by the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD). The possible explanation here might be that the Yemeni efforts aimed at persuading the Arabs that the South

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[Lundin] 1969a; 1984; Korotayev 1994f &c), but consistently denoted during this Period only as *s<sup>2</sup>b*, and never *s<sup>2</sup>rt* (Ja 653, 1; 735, 1; Sh 7/1; 8/1 &c); whereas the term *s<sup>2</sup>rt* (corresponding to the Arabic denomination of clan-tribal groups [of a certain level], *'ashirah*) was used in the Sabaic inscriptions to denote the Arabic «genealogical» *qaba'il* as distinct from the South Arabian territorial *sha'bs* (Beeston 1972a: 257–258; 1972b: 543; Ryckmans J. 1974b: 500; [Piotrovskiy] 1985: 53, 69 &c). It should be mentioned, that the *sha'bs* of the internal Lowlands might have been not so absolutely «anti-genealogical» as the Highland *sha'bs* long before Islam (Robin 1979a; 1982b). In addition to that the fact the *sha'b* Saba' Kahlan was one of the first to be affected by the process of «qabilization», might be also explained by the point that Marib is situated on the edge of the internal desert, i.e. in one of the South Arabian zones subjected in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium A.D. to the most intensive infiltration of the Arabs. It should be also stressed that there is some direct evidence for the integration of a certain number of the Arabs into the *sha'b* Saba' in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. E.g. Ry 507 (July AD 518, or rather 523 – line 10) mentions certain *TMM<sup>m</sup> bn M'D<sup>n</sup> d-QSMLT SB' Y<sup>n</sup>*, «Tamim, the son of Ma'dan, of Qasmalat, the Sabaean» (line 12). As has been convincingly shown by Piotrovskiy [ ] (1985, 54–57), this Tamim is of Arab origins from the bedouin tribe Qasmalah (= al-Qasamil) known in the area of Najran; whereas *SB'Y<sup>n</sup>* is nothing else but a very clear denomination of one's affiliation to the *sha'b* Saba' (Beeston 1978a: 14).

<sup>38</sup> The emphasis is mine. This is simply to draw attention again to the important role of the possession of valid genealogies for one's integration in the Early Islamic society as its full-right member – A.K.



Arabians were as Arab as the Arabs themselves,<sup>39</sup> or even more Arab than the Arabs (*al-‘arab al-‘aribah* as distinct from *al-‘arab al-musta‘ribah* [e.g. [Piotrovskiy] 1977: 20, 23, 29; 1985: 67; Robin 1991e: 64 &c]), and that they had always been Arabs, turned out to be so successful that they managed to persuade in this not only themselves, not only the Arabs (see e.g. Ibn al-Kalbi 1966, I: 40-41), but also the Arabists as well.

Notwithstanding all the difference between the Yemenis and the above-mentioned groups of the Persian soldiers (it seems sufficient to mention that the Yemen population was quite comparable by the 7<sup>th</sup> century with the number of all the Arabs taken together), some similarity between these two cases also appears to have existed. As in the case of the Persian soldiers the Yemenis seem to have managed to enter early Islamic society as full members very much because early Islamic society badly needed the military manpower, whereas the Yemenis constituted a substantial part (and sometimes even majority) of most Islamic armies.

«One reads that the warriors of [the early Islamic conquests] were northerners... It now seems very doubtful that they were predominantly northerners, let alone exclusively so, for the manpower required for such speedy and vigorous military campaigns was to be found only in the Yemen. The Yemen of the 1<sup>st</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century, like the Yemen of today, was the only area of the Arabian Peninsula of sufficient population density to provide large numbers of troops. What is more, we are not simply talking of the other ranks. The presence of vast numbers, often in the majority, of Yemenis participating in the great Islamic conquests of the 1<sup>st</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century in predominantly tribal companies from the highest to the lowest rank is amply attested and, what is more, they were seasoned fighters, not in any way raw recruits. It follows also that great numbers of those Yemenis participating in the conquests settled in the territories which they helped to conquer» (Smith 1990: 134; a detailed factological substantiation for this statement can be found in al-Mad‘aj 1988: 69–70, 86–88, 123–125, 127, 132, 140–143).

While remaining a realist, one naturally has to suppose that the Yemenis managed to enter the Islamic society (and the Arab ethnoses) so smoothly as its full members (and not like dependent *mawali*) not because the genealogies which they worked out looked so convincing, but mainly because of the very important role of the Yemenis in the Islamic conquests.<sup>40</sup> It rather seems that because of the very important role of the Yemeni manpower the Arabs allowed themselves to be persuaded that their fellows in the *jihad* were as Arab as they were (and, consequently, that the Yemenis' genealogies were as authentic as their own). To insist on the non-Arab identity of the Yemenis, on the invalidity of their

<sup>39</sup> And these efforts were by no means senseless, as some Arabs for some time refused to recognize the Arab identity of the Yemenis (e.g. [Piotrovskiy] 1985: 67).

<sup>40</sup> Of course, one should not also forget here such important factors as the basic cultural (including linguistic) proximity of the Arabs and Yemenis, the intensive contacts between the South Arabian civilization and the Northern Arabs during all the time of its existence, a significant degree of the arabization of Yemen prior to Islam (due to infiltration to the area of considerable groups of Arabs) &c.

genealogies would have led to the alienation of a very strong military power, whereas none of the fiercely confronting each other Arab factions of early Islamic society could afford such a «luxury».

As a result, the main mass of the agricultural population of the Northern Highlands found themselves in possession of deep, ancient (and quite veritable even from the point of view of the Northern Arabs) genealogies, which provided quite a strong «ideological» basis for the struggle by this population for the preservation of their high social status. The «genealogical ideology» (the representation of the tribes and their confederations as descendants of certain eponym ancestors tied by kinship relations) turned out to provide also a suitable basis for the development of the tribal political culture, assisting in the working out of the mechanisms of flexible interaction of the tribal entities of various levels.

On the other hand, as a result of the considerable decline of the state structures<sup>41</sup> in the Northern Highlands after a relatively short period of their consolidation at the beginning of the Islamic age, the population of the area confronted the necessity to defend themselves by themselves. To a certain extent the genesis of the tribal organization (for which there were already certain pre-conditions in the area) can be considered as the Highlanders' response to this challenge. The tribal organization, having been formed, turned out to be so effective in many respects, that until the most recent time it resisted quite successfully all the attempts by the state systems (which periodically strengthened in South Arabia) to eradicate (or significantly weaken) it.

In the Islamic age the main result of the interaction of the tribal and state organization in the Northern Highlands turned out to be not the undermining or liquidation of the tribal structures, but the emergence of the North Yemen multiplicity. Within this multiplicity, though the relations between its state center (headed most of this millennium by Zaydi imams)<sup>42</sup> and its tribal periphery were far from being without conflicts, some equilibrium was achieved, the functions of the system elements were (quite informally) delimited, reciprocally (to a certain extent) acceptable «rules of game» were worked out.

A significant role in the preservation of the North Yemeni tribal organization was, no doubt, played by the geographical environment of the Northern Highlands. On the one hand, the very rugged terrain of the area helped significantly the tribes in their struggle for the preservation of their autonomy (cp. Korotayev 1995e). On the other hand, the limited economic potential of the meagre and arid North-East Highlands<sup>43</sup> did not create sufficient stimuli which

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<sup>41</sup> As well as the political systems of the chiefdoms.

<sup>42</sup> It should be mentioned that this state center originated with the direct support of the Northern tribes (e.g. Obermeyer 1982; Gochenour 1984b; Dresch 1989: 167–173; Abu Ghanim 1990).

<sup>43</sup> The main exception here, the an'a Plain, seems to belong firmly to those very exceptions which only confirm the rule, as this was precisely an'a which served as the main stronghold of the state organization in the Northern Highlands for most of the last two millennia (e.g. Serjeant, Lewcock 1983; Lundin 1988).

would push the state centers to struggle with an adequate vigour for the complete subjugation of the area to the full state control. The same factors also hindered the processes of the internal stratification of the Northern tribes (*e.g.* Dresch 1984b: 156; 1989: 8–15). The transformation of the warlike, armed and independent tribesmen into the mass of obedient peasants, submissive tax-payers demanded tremendous effort and expenses on the part of the states, whereas promising very limited economic yields. The much more humid and fertile Southern Highlands (with a significantly less rugged terrain) were much more attractive in this respect.<sup>44</sup>

The genesis of the tribal organization in the North-East Yemeni Highlands can be also well considered as the «response» by the area socio-political system to the «challenge» of the second socio-ecological crisis of the North-East in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD.<sup>45</sup> With respect to the Highland area this crisis seems to have been at least partly caused by the «prestige economy» of the Highland chiefdoms which led to the overstrain of the very fragile natural environment of the region (*e.g.* to the extreme degradation of the natural vegetal cover of the East of the Northern Mountains).<sup>46</sup> The socio-ecological environment of the region does not appear to have been able to sustain the prestige consumption of the *qayls* and their entourage. The overcoming of the second socio-ecological crisis seems to have been achieved through the «seizure», the «ousting» of the qaylite aristocracy by the region socio-political system through the genesis of the tribal organization which in this area secured the reproduction of a rather complex and developed agricultural society by the procurement of a very «economical» surplus production.

On the one hand, the tribal organization of the area population made it possible for the tribesmen to struggle successfully (with the arms in their hands) for the preservation of a rather low level of taxation on the part of the state center of the North Yemen multiplicity. On the other hand, it secured the effective control by

<sup>44</sup> *E.g.* Stookey explains the absence of any serious attempts to subjugate the Northern tribes on the part of the Rasulid state (the 12<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries) in the following way: «The Rasulids were not militant proselytizers by temperament, and chose to maximize their secular satisfactions within the productive areas they could handily govern, rather than to dissipate their energies in an apocalyptic struggle for control of territory which had little to offer in the way of potential revenue» (Stookey 1978: 124).

<sup>45</sup> Robin 1984: 220–221; 1991e: 67; Dayton 1979: 127 &c. This crisis affected most seriously the North-East Lowlands which experienced a dramatic decline already by the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD and after that they never managed to overcome this decline completely. But this crisis affected the North-East Highlands as well. However, the Highland population did manage to get out of it without any fall in the level of its self-organization (though also without the complete recovery of the area natural environment).

<sup>46</sup> *E.g.* Robin gives the following striking example: «...Dans le mont *awlan* près de *dhi-Bin*, totalement dénudé de nos jours, a-t-on tué au cours de trois chasses, vers le début de l'ére chrétienne, 4000 bouquetins; un tel nombre d'animaux sauvages ne pouvait vivre que si la montagne était couverte de broussailles» (Robin 1984: 220–221; the data mentioned by Robin are taken from the qaylite inscription Robin/Kuhl = Ja 2874; according to Robin this degradation of the natural vegetal cover appears to have taken place in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD).

the tribal agricultural population over resources used for the maintenance of the non-agricultural strata of the tribal zone (including its intellectual and political elites).

In the process of the area social system adaptation to the worsening economic-ecological conditions and the finding its way out of the socio-ecological crisis some role seems to have been played by the above-mentioned development of the highly individualized private land property relations and the dissolution of the system of the communal economic mutual help. The social anthropologists (basing themselves mainly on the oral information gathered from the informants of the senior generation) have described a rather severe (though rather effective at the same time) traditional (it seems to have existed up to the 1950s) model of the tribal zone population behaviour in the years of famine (caused by the droughts, rather frequent in the area): in such cases the neighbours would not tend to help each other through the sharing of the scarce resources, but rather the heads of the less economically effective households would sell their land to the more economically effective agriculturalists and move to S.,an'a' to serve in the Imam's army (incidentally, this seems to demonstrate that the taxes which the tribesmen paid to the Imams could be to a certain extent regarded as a sort of «premium» payments to the «insurance fund» of the North Yemen multiplicity). As a result, the more effective agriculturalists would increase their land possessions, and the less effective ones would save their lives (e.g. Dresch 1989: 300–301).

In the process of the agricultural population adaptation to the severe natural environment of the North-East Highlands (especially to the frequent droughts) a significant role appears to have been played by the development of the market relations in the tribal zone of the North. The Yemeni tribal system appeared to have been able to provide their achieving of the level which seems to have been extremely high for a pre-industrial agrarian society. Here a considerable role appears to have been played by the development of such an important North Yemen tribal institution as *hijrah* (e.g. Abu Ghanim 1985: 214f.; vom Bruck 1993: 87–88; Chelhod 1970a: 81–82; 1975: 79–80; 1979: 58–59; 1985: 28–29; Dresch 1989; Kropp 1994: 89; Nielsen 1994: 43; Puin 1984; Stevenson 1985: 63–65 &c).

The *hijrah* is an institution which puts under protection (often documentally formulated) of a tribe (or a group of tribes ) of a certain object. At the meantime the object of *hijrah* could be some people (for example, a family of sayyids [«religious aristocrats» tracing their descent from Muhammad] living in the territory of the given tribe), the places of the meetings between the tribes, markets, towns (populated often mainly by the «weak» population, as well as by the sayyids and qadis [learnt families not tracing their descent from the Prophet] rather than by the tribesmen) &c. In many respects it was due to this institution that the tribal organization managed to sustain in its zone a rather high level of development of market relations – through the establishment of the *hijrahs* guaranteeing the protection by the tribes of hundreds of markets which covered the whole tribal

zone of the North Highlands. The tribes which proclaim, say, the given market as their hijrah take as their obligation (often documentally recorded) the securing of its full safety – e.g. through the guaranteeing of the compensation for a crime committed at the market being paid, say, eleven-fold (*bi-l-muhaddash*). In general, within the territory of the market (or any other place) proclaimed to be a hijrah it is forbidden to commit any violence, even if it is legitamate from the point of view of the tribal law (*'adat*). «All spilling of human blood is forbidden and it's equally forbidden to start a fight or even come to blows there. Here the murderer can meet the son or brother of his victim without fearing for his life» (Chelhod 1979: 58; 1970a: 82; see also e.g. Dresch 1987: 432; 1989; Stevenson 1985: 63–65 &c); whereas the tribe failure to secure the fulfilment of such obligations constitutes a considerable blow upon its reputation (*sharaf*, «honor»).

Here a significant role appears to have been played by the creation of the already mentioned (see note 26 above) rather effective system of protection by the tribes of numerous «quasi-casts» of unarmed «weak» population who are not the members of the tribes but who are under the tribal protection (*u'afa'*, the «weak»), which included in addition to butchers and barbers (*mazayinah*), tribal heralds (*dawashin*), horticulturalists (*ghashshamin*), craftsmen (*ani'in*) &c, also traders (*bayya'in*).

A significant positive role in the evolution of the trade and the market relations in the tribal zone was also no doubt played by the development by the tribes of the system providing the safe passage through the tribal territories of the people not belonging to the respective tribes (Dresch 1987; 1989; Dostal 1990 &c).

As a result, in many tribal areas another important additional informal «insurance fund» originated in the form of the grain stores of the «low-cast» traders (*bayya'in*), who bought the grain of the tribesmen (to whom almost all the plough agriculturalists of the North belonged) in the «fat» years, and sold it back to the tribesmen in the «lean» ones (naturally, not without some profit for themselves). «When we needed money, we sold grain in the *suq* [= market – A.K.]. If we needed grain later, the 'merchants' [a *walad al-suq* {«son of the market» – A.K.} substratum] sold it back at a higher price. The 'merchants' were always hoarding grain. If there was a drought, we had to borrow grain to eat. Sometimes we would borrow, but once you had borrowed and couldn't repay, the 'merchants' took your land... That's how they came to be rich» (from the memories of a Yemeni tribesman recorded by Stevenson [1985: 53] in 'Amran).

At the meantime it appears necessary to stress that the basically rather low social status of the «traders» (in comparison with the one of the ordinary tribesmen) effectively blocked their transformation into the dominant elite of the tribes (within the terms of the Yemeni tribal culture this appears entirely unthinkable), impeded the unproductive dissipation of the resources accumulated by the «merchants» for their own prestige consumption &c.

In any case such a flexible individualized reaction of the tribal agricultural population to the natural disasters (quite usual and regular in this ecological zone)

appeared possible in many respects due to the clearly expressed highly individualized relations of the ownership of the arable lands, established individual owner rights to sell his land – this seems to have been absent in North-East Highlands in the «pre-tribal», «chiefdom» age (this fact can be well documented for the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC – 4<sup>th</sup> century AD) and developed together with the genesis of the tribal organization in this area. Thus, the development of the private land property relations and the decline of the economic communalism with the transition from the chiefdom system to the tribal one contributed to the adaptation of the agricultural population to the worsening ecological conditions and helped to overcome the second North-East Yemeni socio-ecological crisis (of the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD).

On the other hand, within such conditions the full-scale system of the communal reciprocity could lead to the dying out of whole communities. Such things appear to have happened earlier, which seems to be evidenced by the oral tradition (some of which has been recorded rather recently, however it is well confirmed by very early written sources – al-Hamdani n.d.: 135; 1368h [1948]: 20, 202; al-Himyari 1916: 51, 73; 1978: 49, 160; see also Belova 1987: 156; 1992: 253–266; 1996; al-Selwi 1987: 155 &c) on the existence a few centuries ago of the rather impressive practice of *i'tifad*, when in the time of droughts or other natural disasters whole communities which were unable to feed themselves, but which feared to affect their reputation by seeking help of other communities preferred to seat down in a circle and starve to death but not to lose their honour (Serjeant 1987: 37–38). This tradition (which even indicates *ma'afid*, the places where such events took place) appears rather trust-worthy, as it describes a rather logical reaction of high-status tribal agricultural population with developed notions of its honour and reputation, but which has not yet found less painful ways out of the socio-ecological crisis.<sup>47</sup> It seems necessary to stress that by the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium AD this population appears to have found such less painful ways of «honourable» reaction to the periodical droughts. It is remarkable that the information of the recent *i'tifad* tradition concerns a rather distant (though not pre-Islamic – Serjeant 1987) past.

There are certain grounds to suppose that due to the transformation of the communal structures, the genesis of the tribal organization and the development of the market system the North-East Yemen Highland socio-ecological crisis of the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD was more or less overcome.

<sup>47</sup> The information of the Medieval Yemeni authors refers mainly to Pre-Islamic North-East Yemen (the very word *i'tifad* is considered as «Himyarite»), which could serve as additional evidence for the beginning of the second socio-ecological crisis already in the Pre-Islamic period. It is also remarkable that the concrete person mentioned by the Medieval Yemeni sources as practising *i'tifad* was a noble woman (from the well-known Sabaeen aristocratic clan Murathid [*MRTD*]) – al-Hamdani n.d.: 135; al-Himyari 1916: 51, 73; 1978, 160. At the meantime in the more recent tradition dealing with the Islamic period (Serjeant 1987) *i'tifad* is practised by the high-status agricultural population.

Thus, the tribal organization seems to have matched rather well the Northern Highland ecological milieu, as it objectively protected a very fragile and vulnerable economic-ecological environment of the area from overexploitation through the procurement of a very «economical» production of surplus by preventing the excessive taxation (and exploitation in general) of the agriculturalists,<sup>48</sup> precluding any exorbitant growth of the parasitic or prestige elite consumption, while permitting the existence of quite a developed and complex social and cultural structures (including a network of non-agricultural towns, markets, centers of traditional learning &c protected by the tribes). It is even difficult to avoid an impression that the tribal organization was almost the only political form which in the pre-industrial world could secure the sustainable reproduction of complex highly-organized social systems in the extremely meagre and vulnerable economic-ecological environment of the North-East Yemeni Highlands. As Dresch notices, «the land of Hashid and Bakil would provide a poor economic basis for any elaborate exploitative class» (Dresch 1984b: 156; see also 1989: 8–15). I would even say that in the pre-industrial age the socio-economic system of the area was to be freed from «any elaborate exploitative class» (which would have made the North Highland agriculturalists produce excessive surplus destroying finally the vulnerable environment) in order to become sustainable.

It seems reasonable to consider the tribe as the chiefdom alternative<sup>49</sup> rather than a «pre-chiefdom»<sup>50</sup> form of political organization (whereas in some respects the tribe of the North Yemeni type appears to be an even more developed form of political organization than the chiefdom). And in any case there does not seem to be any ground to consider as «primitive» the tribal organization of the Islamic Middle East, which (like the Middle Eastern states) formed as a result of long «post-primitive» evolution as a specific (and quite effective) version of socio-political adaptation of some quite highly developed regional populations to certain natural and socio-historical environment.

«As for tribalism, every educated person should be aware that large-scale societies have organised themselves for centuries without the complex apparatus of government and administration we usually take for granted. Our usual theories of society and the state, whether drawn from Hobbes or Rousseau or whomever, are therefore partial, and on this score there is something tribalism of the kind found in Yemen might teach nearly all of us – lessons in political philosophy» (Dresch 1994: 65–66).

<sup>48</sup> According to the Zaydi doctrine the harvest taxation must not have exceeded rather modest 5–10% (depending on the type of the land – *e.g.* Stookey 1978: 88), and the Northern tribes managed to secure the level of taxation not exceeding these figures for most of this millennium. The almost complete absence of any significant exploitation within the tribe (*e.g.* Dresch 1984b: 156; 1989: 276–319) seems to be here of no less importance.

<sup>49</sup> Whereas in certain respects (as this has already been mentioned above) the tribe seems to be an even more developed political form than the chiefdom.

<sup>50</sup> Or even «pre-state» one. Quite agreeing with Fried, I would rather consider it as a «para-state» form of political organization.