

Social Economic and Political Organization of African Societies in the 19th Century

Content

1. The Social, Economic, and Political organization of African societies with reference to:
 - a) The Baganda
 - b) The Shona
 - c) The Ashanti/Asante.

Buganda Kingdom

Origin

- It is the home of the Baganda people, a Bantu speaking community
- It started off as a small and weak state
- Katerregga doubled the size of Buganda by extending its boundaries in the North and North-East ward into Bunyoro Kitara kingdom
- By 19th century Buganda had gradually grown to become the most powerful kingdom in the region
- It was also the most centralized kingdom in the interior of East Africa.

Factors which led to the growth of a strong Buganda Kingdom in the 19th century

1. Sound economy based on agriculture. The area had fertile soil and abundant rainfall ideal for cultivation especially bananas
2. She had a strong army for defence and conquest
3. Capable rulers e.g. Mutesa I, who were able to unite their people
4. Decline of Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom
5. It was small and compact hence it was easy to govern
6. Participation in the long distance trade where she acquired firearms which the Kabaka used to remain in power

7. Buganda was next to Lake Victoria, hence had good communication and this also gave her a natural defence against her neighbours e.g. Ankole Toro and Bunyoro
8. The Ganda traditions which had defined duties for men and women e.g. women - farmed while men engaged in politics, carpentry, war, bark cloth making etc.
9. She had also acquired a lot of wealth from conquered territories e.g. from Busoga she acquired livestock, iron ore etc.
10. Buganda had a centralized government led by a king (Kabaka) whose position was hereditary and he enjoyed absolute powers.

Social Organisation

- a) They were organised into clans each with its own traditions
- b) The society was divided into several social classes
 - i. The royal family of Kabaka or the ruling class
 - ii. Chiefs
 - iii. Peasants or commoners
 - iv. Slaves
- c) They preserved the umbilical cords of the Kabaka's, royal jawbones and royal tombs to ensure that the past was remembered
- d) The Kabaka was regarded as semi-divine
- e) They had a traditional religion called Lubaale and they worshipped their god called Katonda

- f) They were later converted to Christianity and Islamic religion
- g) They believed in the existence of ancestral spirits
- h) The Baganda practiced polygamous marriage. The Kabaka had a wife from every clan to enhance unity of the kingdom
- i) Had defined roles according to gender.

Political Organisation

1. Buganda had a highly centralised system of government led by the Kabaka
2. The position of the Kabaka was hereditary
3. The capital was at Mengo where the royal palace (Lubiri) was situated.

4. The kingdom was divided into counties called sazas, headed by saza chiefs.
5. The counties were further sub-divided into sub-counties called Gombololas.
6. Gombololas were divided into smaller divisions called muluka headed by a muluka chief
7. The kabaka appointed some leaders to govern vassal states known as Abatangole
8. Had a strong standing army charged with the responsibility of defending the kingdom and conquering more lands.

9. There existed a council of ministers which consisted of Katikiro (Prime minister), Omulamuzi (chief justice), Omuwanika (Treasurer) the Mug-ema (senior chief among the clans/Bataka), Musenero (the chief butler), Mfumbiro (the chief baker).
10. Their main duty was to advise the kabaka
11. Buganda had a parliament known as Lukiiko
12. It was an assembly of chiefs and the kabaka which comprised of 69 members who were nominated by the kabaka.

Duties of the Kabaka

1. He was the head of all political, religious and judicial activities
2. He was the commander-in-chief of the army
3. He appointed or dismissed senior officials in the government e.g. the prime minister (Katikiro)
4. He controlled trade

Duties of the Katikiro

1. Organised tax collection
2. Planned wars in the Kabakas name
3. Protected the Kabaka during wars
4. Informed the Kabaka of decisions he made on court issues.

Functions of the Lukiiko

1. Made laws for the kingdom
2. Advised the kabaka
3. Assisted the kabaka to administer the kingdom
4. Represented the interests of the people
5. Acted as the court of appeal/settled disputes
6. Directed the collection of taxes in the kingdom and planned government expenditure
7. Checked the activities of government

The Bataka were the minor chiefs in charge of clans who were answerable to the mugema (senior chief).

Duties of the chiefs

- a. Collected taxes
- b. Maintained law and order

Economic Organization

- ✓ They grew crops e.g. bananas, maize, rice cassava and millet.
- ✓ Kept animals such as cattle sheep and goats
- ✓ They were iron workers.
- ✓ They practiced crafts such as pottery and bark cloth making
- ✓ They made canoes
- ✓ They traded with their neighbors and were also involved in the long distance trade with the Arabs and Swahili traders
- ✓ They practiced fishing on lake Victoria
- ✓ They hunted wild animals and gathered fruits and wild honey.

The Shona

Origin

They were the original inhabitants of modern Zimbabwe.

Political Organization

1. The kingdom was ruled by a king who was the head of state and government.
2. The office of the king was hereditary
3. The king was the chief religious authority

He was assisted to rule by the

- i. Queen
- ii. Head drummer
- iii. Nine principal wives of the king
- iv. His sister
- v. Commander-in-chief of the army
- vi. Senior son-in-law of the king (Mbokurumme)
- vii. The chancellor
- viii. Head doorkeeper
- ix. Head cook
- x. Lesser chiefs who paid tribute to the King by providing labour, cattle and agricultural produce.

4. The king controlled trade and used the revenue]
5. from trade to run the army and the empire
6. The king had a standing army for defence and expansion
7. The vassal states were ruled by Chiefs who paid tribute to the king in the form of slaves and gold, ivory and cattle.
8. Symbols of national unity included the royal fire which was lit at the court of the Mwene Mutapa

Social Organization

1. The Shona were divided into clans with names such as monkey, leopard, elephant and thus could not eat meat of such animals
2. They believed in the existence of one all powerful god and creator known as Mwari who was worshipped through priests.
3. The priests presided over religious functions. They came from the Rozwi clan. Powers of the priests included:-
 - Warding of epidemics, diseases and wars
 - Rainmaking

5. They believed in the existence of ancestral spirits i.e.
 - a. Vadzimu - family spirits
 - b. Mhondoro - clan spirit
 - c. Chaminuka - national spirit that settled clan disputes and protected people against injustices in government.
6. Shona elders were highly respected because after death they would become intermediaries
7. Shona were a polygamous society
8. Among the Shona, marriage between related clans was prohibited (exogamous)
9. They lived in stone buildings and they were skilled in masonry.

Economic Organization

1. They practiced agriculture and grew millet cassava, beans fruits, vegetables etc
2. They kept livestock e.g cows
3. Their main economic activity was trade
4. They practiced long distance trade with the Arabs and Waswahili and the Portuguese. They sold gold, ivory, skins, slaves and copper in exchange for cotton cloth, guns, copper, glassware, beads etc.

5. They hunted elephants for ivory that was in demand by the Portuguese, Arabs and Waswahili
6. They gathered wild fruits and honey
7. Practiced crafts such as basketry, pottery and carving items from ivory and soapstone
8. Made iron goods e.g. spears knives shields hoes etc
9. They did fishing in rivers and lakes.

The Asante/Ashanti

Origin

- a. They are the largest of the Akan speaking people who occupy the southern part of Ghana
- b. The Asante kingdom was created in the late 17th century
- c. By the beginning of the 19th century, the Asante empire had expanded to include the present day Ghana, part of Togo and
- d. cote d ivoire.

Reasons for the growth of the Asante Empire

- 1) Presence of several small states around Kumasi, they formed the nucleus from which the empire was founded.
- 2) They also had a common ancestry.
- 3) Wealth from trade i.e. the Trans-Saharan trade and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade
- 4) The state had a strong agricultural base which provided enough food
- 5) They were united under the Golden stool

- 6) Able rulers e.g. Osei tutu (1680-1717) and Opuku Ware (1720-1750)
- 7) Disintegration of Denkyira kingdom enabled the Asante to assert their independence
- 8) Military strength due to introduction of guns and gunpowder.
- 9) Geographical position of the kingdom. It occupied the central part of modern Ghana.
- 10) The annually Odwira festival made the Kingdom more cohesive.

Political Organisation of the Asante Empire

1. The Asante empire had a centralized organization headed by a king known as Asantehene
2. At the height of its prosperity (1801-1824) the empire was divided into three divisions
 - a. Kumasi (nucleus) under direct control of the Asantehene
 - b. Amattoo / metropolitan - states outside Kumasi ruled by state kings or Omanhene
 - c. Conquered states or provincial states

Asantehene



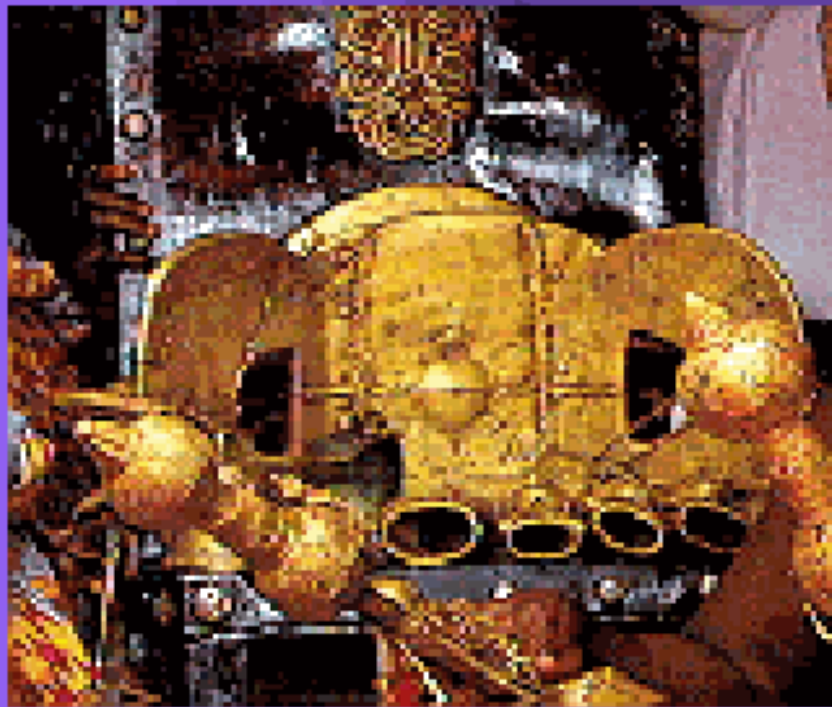
3. The conquered states were loosely bound to the Asantehene and the union. The Asantehene appointed officers in these conquered provinces to represent him.
4. The Asantehene ruled with the help of a confederacy union council of state kings (Omanhene)

The Omanhene were allowed some autonomy but they had to:-

1. Pay tribute to the Asantehene
2. Contribute soldiers in times of war
3. Swear an oath of allegiance to the Asantehene
4. Give up the right of declaring war on a fellow Omanhene
5. Grant their own subjects the right to appeal to the high court at Kumasi
6. Attend the annual Odwira festival:-
 - a. To pay allegiance to the Asantehene
 - b. Honour the dead
 - c. And settle disputes

7. The Golden stool introduced during the reign of Osei Tutu was a symbol of unity. It bound the Asante states together.
8. Each Omanhene was given a black stool to signify unity in his own territory.
9. A national festival, Odwira festival was established when all the Omanhenes of the union gathered in Kumasi. This festival united the states

This is the Golden Stool



Tradition has it that this stool, covered with pure gold, floated out of the sky and landed on the lap of the first Asantehene (Asante king), Osei-tutu. He unified the people in the 17th century. His chief priest declared that the soul of the nation resided in this stool.

The Golden Stool was a
symbol of



Military Organization

1. The empire had a strong standing army
2. The army was divided into several wings :-
 - a. The van (Adonten)
 - b. The rear (Kyidom)
 - c. The right wing (Nifa)
 - d. The left wing (Benkum)
 - e. Body of scouts (Akwanstafo)
 - f. The king's bodyguards (Gyaso)
 - g. Cavalry wing.
3. Military service was compulsory for all able bodied men
4. The empire had a well established judicial/ court system at Kumasi headed by Asantehene
5. The Omanhene were given powers to try minor cases in their states.

Social Organization

- Were members of the Akan speaking (Twi) clans and therefore they shared some customs.
- They were bound together by the Golden stool
- Other states used black stools as the spiritual base of their authority
- They worshipped many gods and goddesses but believed in the supreme creator Nyame
- They also practiced ancestral worship.
- They had matrilineal system of inheritance

- The society was divided into classes:-
 - a. Royal family - Asantehene and his family and kings of the states
 - b. Merchants and peasants - comprised majority of Asante people
 - c. Slaves - who were captives. They provided labour for the royal family
- Traditional dances and other cultural activities were also important
- The Asante were a wealthy people and lived in luxury
- Kumasi was a well planned city with wide streets and good sanitation

Economic Organisation

1. They were farmers and they grew crops such as kolanuts, grains, fruits and yams.
2. They kept livestock e.g. cattle
3. They participated in local trade where they exchanged fish, salt and cloth with their neighbours for gun and gun powder.
4. They participated in long distance trade as middlemen between traders from North Africa and those from the south.

5. They exchanged gold, slaves and ivory with cotton cloth, gun and gun powder
6. Hunted game meat and gathered kolanuts
7. They practiced arts and crafts
8. They practiced iron working and made tools like hoes, arrows and bangles
9. They practiced mining e.g. mining of gold.

KCSE SAMPLE QUESTIONS

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