



headed by a senior male member, who together with other clan elders constituted a repository of social and ritual responsibilities. Both the age grade system and the practice of convening mass assemblies to make crucial decisions were prevalent among the Tallensi. Groups and not individuals constituted the source of political authority.

The various clans depended, for the most part, on communal labor. It was possible for large lineages within clans to accumulate wealth based on their size; however, no social privileges attached to wealth. Socially and politically, therefore, the Tallensi were a homogenous, sedentary and egalitarian society.

What is immediately prominent in our consideration of stateless societies is the absence of centralization and concentration of authority. For the most part it is difficult to point to any individual as the overall head or ruler of different communities. The exercise of leadership in the sense of full-time authority was similarly unknown. Whatever authority that existed often affected very limited aspects of the lives of individuals. At the same time, classes hardly existed in these traditional societies. It is indeed doubtful whether an equivalent for the word “class” exists in any indigenous African language — and language reflects the thoughts and values of those who speak it.

Increased productivity and specialization in the use of tools, together with increased trading activities between various communities on the one hand, and with outsiders on the other, gave rise to a steady growth of private property, internal differentiation/stratification, and semi-feudalism. Warfare, conquest, and voluntary borrowing were some of the other factors at work during the period of colonial transition.

Early authority patterns were commonly codified in ritualized forms of leadership. Even where systems of social control increased in scope, ritual leaders in many cases continued to exert a moderating influence over secular leaders. Empire states were established at Kanem-Bornu, Songhai, Mali, Oyo, Sokoto, Benin, Zulu, Ngwato, Memba, Bayankole, Kede, Somuke, Hausa-Fulani, etc.

