COMMUNAL SELF-GOVERNMENT
AND THE KING OF THE STATE
OF ARRAPH'A

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INTRODUCTION

The cuneiform archives from the region of Arraph'a throw light on the political and economic history of this country for the period of approximately one and a half century. The state in question had no particularly important stimulus for development. It was a small autonomous state adhering to a policy of non-interference in the fights for hegemony. The socio-economic structure of this state seems to have been able to function without radical changes, such as very often were unavoidable for the preservation of the existence of the fighting great powers. Nevertheless Arraph'a too was plunged into war and had to struggle for existence when the armies of two neighbouring countries clashed on its territory 2).

Thus, on the whole we can regard the socio-economic structure of Arraph'a as a typical one for the period, and in no way out of the ordinary, although whenever a state of war emerges, this makes a certain difference for our analysis of the political pattern in question.


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2) H. Lewy, "Miscellanea Nuziana", Or, 28/1, 1959, pp. 22 sqq.
Preliminarily, our point of view on the most important question for the evaluation of the society under discussion should be stated: namely, what was the correlation between joint ownership and individual ownership in immovables. It seems to us that the data of the archives of Nuza permit of the conclusion that joint ownership in land definitely predominated (cf. p. 233, footnote 1). This conclusion is incompatible with an arbitrary identification of the social institutions of the state of Arrapha with feudal institutions. In what way the predominance of joint ownership influences the state structure, has not yet been investigated at all, although this could shed important new light upon the subject in question, viz., the base of the correlation between the communal self-government and the king.

The most sensible explanation of the peculiar features of property conditions in Arrapha has been suggested by P. Koschaker who pointed out that in Nuza the usual transaction of acquiring real estate by private persons through the adoption of the purchaser by the vendor (tuppi märūti) could be explained by the existence of an exclusive property right of extended family communes (Hausgemeinschaften).

One can only regret that Koschaker suggested also another, parallel explanation of the same fact: namely, supposing the well-known ilku-service to be an indication of the existence of a feudal system, he suggested that direct alienation of land was forbidden by the crown. Subsequently, the first explanation was simply forgotten, although it was the only one for which Koschaker himself had presented a detailed argumentation 1). However, it was precisely the second explanation which was accepted by all students of the Nuza documents, without its further verification. It is characteristic that the ideas of the most consistent follower of this theory (H. Lewy) were rejected by the more cautious follower of the same (P. M. Purves); but the principle of the interpretation was never questioned.

1) P. Koschaker, „Fratriarchat, Hausgemeinschaft und Mutterrecht in Keilschriftrechten”, ZA, NF VII 1933; ibid., „Randnotizen zu neueren Keilschriftlichen Rechtsurkunden”, ZA, NF IX, 1936, pp. 196 sqq.