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RATIONALITY AND WESTERN SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT MAX WEBER'S CONCEPT OF EUROPE

Throughout the 20th century, Max Weber's sociological views had a highly profound impact on almost all fields of historical-social sciences. His viewpoints enriched the ways of historical interpretation with numerous valuable insights. Above all, Weber intended to present the features of Western capitalism. However, his researches also tackled social and cultural components of modern age capitalist relations, as well as societies outside Europe. In the focal point of his way of thinking one can find the notion of „rationality”, and accordingly, Weber grasped the formation of modern societies with the gradual development of rationality. In his historical analyses, Weber attempted to unveil the early forms of rationalistic endeavours in ancient and medieval societies by comparing the characteristics of „Western” and „Eastern” ways of development. Basically, Weber's image of Europe featured the historical morphology of rationality.

Weber accepted the Neo-Kantian concept that if at all, it is science that may give a meaning to the tangled network of human experiences. He regarded his statements – his West-East typology, too – not as a direct reflection of historical reality but as a conceptual construction to which reality may be related. He deemed that sociological models were subject to change and modification based on new scientific findings. Hence his theses on Western development were conditional, too, and largely probability-based. Anyway, in the 20th century, Weber's inclinations of systematisation played an essential role in transforming European historical interpretation into a field of stricter scientific requirements. In place of „Europe”, Weber used „the West” to indicate that he did not attempt to comprehend the civilisational unity of the continent. Instead, he wanted to explain the reasons and the character of the magnificent shift – industrialisation, capitalisation, commercialisation – which took place in Western Europe.

Weber's concept of rationality encompassed a very broad spectrum in meaning. He regarded the mathematical foundations and processes of ancient Greek science „rational”, also the empirical experimenting methods of modern science, emphasising that such phenomena had not been present in Asia. Likewise, Weber also deemed the system of Roman law „rational”. In his eyes, the appearance of officials in modern European states and certain characteristics of Western music and architecture were both „rational”. To Weber, rationality had a bifurcated meaning: on the one hand, it meant the peculiar relation between the intellect and the world, and on the other, the methodical processes used to reach a particular objective.²

Rational economy played a vital role in Weber's reasoning. To his mind, difference should

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² Further reading on Weberian terminology: Swedberg, Richard 2005: *The Max Weber Dictionary*. Stanford University Press, Stanford. For this treatise, the following editions of Weber were used: Weber, Max 1927: *General Economic History*. The Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois. Weber, Max 1930: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, George Allen and Unwin Ltd. London.

be made between capitalistic and non-capitalistic profit acquisitions. Spoils of war was a good example of the latter. However, according to Weber capitalist profit was still too broad of a notion which needed further differentiation. For one, he mentioned the capitalist adventurer, looking for occasional profit, the one whose undertakings were based on speculation, long-distance trade and power relations in politics. Contrary to this type, Western capitalists were characterised by continuous production, rational business organisation, and regular adjustments to actual market needs. There were further important features, like the separation of the household and the capitalist manufacture, and double entry bookkeeping which enabled exact calculations. Only this form of Capitalism counted as „rationalistic” in Weber’s works.³ This uniquely strong intertwining of „Capitalism” and „rationality”, Weber argued, was a trademark of the West only.

Weber’s statements about Western rationalism has been employed by many researchers to prove why successful Capitalism only emerged in Western Europe and North America during the 19th century. But just to be exact, it needs to be emphasised that Weber regarded rationality as a largely general phenomenon and not as a category which is only applicable to Western societies. Thus, the question is not why rationality developed in the West and not elsewhere, but rather, what differences there were between Western rationality and rationalistic elements of non-European societies – often perceivable within certain religions – and why non-rationalistic views were repressed more fully than in the other civilisations.

Weber was looking for an answer to why it was Western Europe where the system of rationalistic economy evolved. Meanwhile, he did research on the effects of Protestantism and other world religions on economic and social relations. Weber concluded that the Protestant doctrine of salvation had led to a form of asceticism, and as a result, regular work had gradually been associated with the capitalist behavior of wealth accumulation. These factors contributed to the process of capitalistic accumulation with essential impulses all throughout the early modern age. By the 19th century, „*the religious root of modern economic humanity is dead*” and the ethos of a new economy which was originally conceived on grounds of Protestant ideas finally „*has been stripped of its religious import.*”⁴

Weber’s theses on Protestant ethics has been widely disputed and numerous researches attempted to limit the validity of his views. The popularity of his thoughts linking Reformation to Capitalism, which went beyond the boundaries of science, stemmed from the fact that Weber, a self-declared Bourgeois, both German and „European”, became an influential presenter of the historical role of the Protestant Bourgeoisie, whether he liked it or not. His emphasis on the religious-cultural factor and the virtues of Protestant work ethics enabled Bourgeois thinkers after him to utilise his views as a counterpoint to the Marxist economic point and Capitalist exploitation. True, Weber’s works may doubtlessly be interpreted as a polemy with Marxism, however, it would be an oversimplification to regard him solely as the main thinker of Bourgeois societal apology. Although Weber was on a different track, he acknowledged the values of Marx’s social philosophy nonetheless, moreover, he regarded Marx to have been the most influential thinker of the 19th century beside Nietzsche. The differences between their views received ideological overtones due to modern social and class conflicts.

³ Weber, Max 1930: 13-31.

⁴ Weber, Max 1927: 368-369.

In reality, Weber never stated that Protestantism was the sole reason for the birth of Capitalism. It is indeed true that Weber regarded the effect of Protestant ethics as one of the most important factors thereof, but he also thoroughly analysed further economic and social components. Applying multiple factors, Weber was unable to identify the origins of Capitalism only with economic aspects, which is to be observed in Marx's works. Similarly, he also thought that the approach emphasising the exclusiveness of the religious-cultural factor was lopsided.⁵

Weber, by placing rational organisation of work and the production system of modern economy into the focus of his analysis, did truly defend Western Capitalism against some of the typical accusations. He criticised Simmel by pointing out the flaw in his idea of identifying money-centred economy with Capitalism in order to emphasise the importance of rational production and that of the organisation of work. He paid less attention on views of exploitation, propagated by Marx, and instead focused more on the asceticism and attitudes of accumulation of Protestant Bourgeoisie, especially on the consequences of Western European citizens' hard work which led to the 19th century development of national economies. Though Weber was aware of the dark side of rationality – he said that rational processes, techniques, and bureaucracy may even hinder modern societies – he left no doubt that he intended to understand, and not criticise, the magnificent European economic developments of the Modern age.⁶

His dispute with Sombart, too, may be best grasped by considering his firm belief in the unique nature of European Capitalism.⁷ Weber consistently criticised the views of the famed historian of economics, mainly those which stated that the large orders of modern state armies, the needs for luxury goods and the incoming commodities from overseas colonies were essential in the formation of Capitalism. Weber deemed the factors listed in the interpretation by Sombart „external”. He asserted the importance of mass consumption vs. luxury consumption, continuous production of Protestant entrepreneurs and the profound industrial mechanism of the rational principle- and procedure-based society vs. colonial resources.

In the course of depicting Western Capitalism, Weber placed more stress on the „internal factors”; thus producing arguments for those who sought to interpret the rise of European Bourgeoisie as a process of organic development and an exceptional performance of mankind. Contrary to this, Marxist criticism had a somewhat similar orientation as Simmel and Sombart, because it emphasised the exploitative character of Capitalism. The differences between the two concepts of Capitalism had their impacts on the image of the history of Europe. It is no coincidence that late 20th century modernisation theories – by e.g. Parsons and Rostow – proposed the expansion of a positively assessed Western development to a universal model which was greatly influenced by Max Weber, not only methodically, but also perspectively.

5 Bendix, Reinhard 1977: *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 49-82.

6 Beside Weber, another peculiar contemporary interpretation of Capitalism was Georg Simmel's *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900). Simmel, Georg 1990: *The Philosophy of Money*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London-New York.

7 Werner Sombart's work *Der moderne Kapitalismus* was first published in 1902. Sombart, Werner 1919: *Der moderne Kapitalismus*. Duncker und Humblot, Munich-Leipzig.

The Neo-Marxist centre-periphery theories, which questioned modernisational theories, based their perceptions of an exploiting Europe in the modern world system.

Beside Protestant ethics, another important religious sociological factor which Weber elaborated on was Jewish prophetic ethics. Weber argued that prophets had been of key importance in the history of Jewish religion, because they contributed largely to secularisation of the world. This concept is more readily understood when coupled with Weber's thoughts on magic. Weber interpreted magic as acts, procedures or relations to the outside world which stereotype rites and traditional forms of acting or thinking. Magic can therefore be interpreted as the direct opposite of rationality. Weber thought that rationality was impeded by religions which employed magic. To this day, the majority of religions incorporate both magic and rationalistic elements which coexist side by side. A great historic exception is Judaism, where prophets broke and annihilated magic. In reality, magic was retained well after the prophets had appeared, however, the practices became unorthodox and were claimed to have originated from the devil. In the long run, Jewish prophetic ethics was key because it contributed to rationalistic procedures gaining ground in more and more fields of Western society.⁸

According to Weber, the Jewish prophets' firm attitude against magic lived on in Christianity, however, its consistency weakened somewhat in the religious practices of the medieval popular church. Hence the historical importance of Protestantism may gain a more profound meaning from the viewpoint of medieval Christianity. Reformation opposed the Catholic cult of saints, various religious holidays as well as pictures and statues in church, and they put a stronger emphasis again on the „anti-magic” behavior formulated by Old Testament prophets of the Jewish and monotheist Christian religions.⁹ Protestantism kept a distance from pictures and idols, not unlike Judaism or Islam. Reformation, which promoted the development of Western rationality, brought the original orientation of Jewish prophetic ethics versus magic to perfection.

Weber considered the anti-magic of Judaism and Christianity as a broad prerequisite of modern societies. He thought that the development of Asia Minor and the West diverged from Eastern societies. Religions in the Far East were not characterised by an essential orientation which would have enabled them to break away from magic permanently. Weber presents the „magical garden” of Asia as a counterexample to Western rationality. His ideas on the topic influenced 20th century modernisational theories, too. These theorists viewed secularisation as

8 Weber on the relation of magic and prophecy: „Magic involves a stereotyping of technology and economic relations. When attempts were made in China to inaugurate the building of railroads and factories a conflict with geomancy ensued. The latter demanded that in the location of structures in certain mountains, forests, rivers and cemetery hills, foresight should be exercised in order not to disturb the rest of the spirits... In all times there has been but one means of breaking down the power of magic and establishing a rational conduct of life, this means is great rational prophecy. Not every prophecy by any means destroys the power of magic, but it is possible for a prophet who furnishes credentials in the shape of miracles and otherwise, to break down the traditional sacred rules. Prophecies have released the world from magic and in doing so have created the basis for our modern science and technology, and for capitalism. In China such prophecy has been waiting...” Weber 1927: 361-362.

9 Weber interpreted Catholicism as a sort of „politheistic” religion, although he did not possess any serious knowledge on the nature of the Catholic religion. Stark, Werner 1968: The Place of Catholicism in Max Weber's Sociology of Religion. In: *Sociological Analysis*. Vol. 29. No. 4. 202-210.

a necessary prerequisite to modernisation, and the lack of the former, they claimed, may have been the reason for the relative inertia of Eastern societies.

Beside rational Capitalism and Jewish prophetic ethics, Weber attempted to grasp the characteristic features of Western development by presenting even more factors. He placed a sharp emphasis on demonstrating the different character of the „Western” and the „Eastern” city. Weber claimed that the city as a communal organisation only existed in the West. By „West”, he meant the world of the Mediterranean Antiquity and that of the Western European Middle Ages. According to Weber, *„the citizen of the middle ages was a citizen because... participated in the choice of administrative officials. That cities have not existed outside the occident in the sense of a political community is a fact calling for explanation”*¹⁰

Weber linked the legal-municipal autonomy of the Western city to the way it defended itself. He believed that ancient and medieval cities could only have come to existence as an association of citizens (*synoikismos* or *coniuratio*) because the Western city was primarily an organisation of defence. The community of citizens who were able to arm themselves could upkeep municipal autonomy against external influence, whereas *„everywhere outside the west the development of the city was prevented by the fact that the army of the prince is older than the city”*.¹¹ Weber derived the overwhelming military force of the Eastern rulers from irrigation in agriculture. He claimed that irrigation, an organisation-intensive type of farming, could only be implemented in states with a bureaucracy strong enough to regulate subjects’ lives to the most minuscule detail. *„That the king also expressed his power in the form of a military monopoly is the basis of the distinction between the military organisation of Asia and that of the west.”*¹² According to Weber, a Bourgeois community which arm themselves had traces in ancient Mesopotamia and India, too, but *„... these beginnings later disappear as the great kingdom arises on the basis of water regulation”*.¹³ In Eastern states cities did not possess a legal autonomy, so the strengthening of Bourgeoisie, a social group of key importance in the development of Western rationalism, did not happen in the end.

The ideal type of Eastern and Western cities can be differentiated from one another by the separation of ritual communities. Weber thought that by the Middle Ages Western cities had given birth to a ritual community, held together by the same Christian cult, while Eastern societies had failed to show the same development. He quoted the Indian city as a peculiar example, where ritually different castes had resulted in mutually exclusive occupational groups within the city. Contrary to this, the medieval Western city had a homogenous cultic community held together by the Communion, which included everyone but the Jews, and it enabled the Bourgeois community to interact with one another as individuals without any regard to tribal and occupational identity.

The founding of a cultic community of citizens from different families and tribal groups was made possible by the most important innovation of Christian religion. When the Apostles decided that the universal mission of Christianity was superior to the ritual prescriptions of

10 Weber, Max 1927: 318-319

11 Weber, Max 1927: 320.

12 Weber, Max 1927: 321.

13 Weber, Max 1927: 322.

the Old Testament, and when they agreed that they would not force the pagan-born Christians to follow the prescriptions meticulously, they practically enabled the establishment of a cultic community which went beyond the constraints of tribal- and blood relations. „*The final factor was the day in Antioch... when Paul, in opposition to Peter espoused fellowship with the uncircumcised. The magical barriers between clans, tribes and peoples, which were still known in the ancient polis to a considerable degree, were thus set aside and the establishment of the occidental city was made possible.*”¹⁴ Contrary to the religions of the classical Antique world, where religion had intertwined closely with political-national identity, Christianity separated the issue of belonging to a religion and belonging to a socio-cultural group. In general, terminating the primary importance of tribal and occupational groups made it possible that the relations between individuals are regulated by rational paradigms, and this was, indeed, a necessary prerequisite to the evolution of Western Capitalism.

All in all, Weber placed a marked emphasis on two features of Western urban development. Firstly, he highlighted the importance of city autonomy, and secondly, he made references to the importance of the disintegration of tribal ties.¹⁵ Urban self government could have been interpreted along the lines of the „liberty motif”, a concept widely employed by European historians, however, Weber placed the main stress elsewhere. By putting defence and irrigation to the foreground he sought to derive the differences between „Western” and „Eastern” cities from economic and social structural factors.

The West-East differentiation underwent some changes in Weber’s works. It did not appear as a political-philosophical thought to grasp the „liberty motif” that would have expressed a kind of political „Europeanism”, but rather as tool of sociological modelling for creating historical-sociological ideas to describe the essence of Western social development. Bourgeoisie, having grown up in the protective bubble of urban autonomy, became the core of modern society. It proved to be an important factor in Weber’s reasoning: between the traditional agrarian society and the political centre of power a legally independent social layer had been born, the economic activities of whom had been least influenced by politics.

The characteristics of Western legal development was yet another phenomenon Weber approached as a factor which promoted the birth of modern societies. To his mind, the impact of Roman law was essential in establishing the conditions for rational production. „*The reception of the Roman law was crucial only in the sense that it created formal juristic thinking.*”¹⁶ The essentials of formal law lay in its predictability. Contrary to ancient Greek practice, where the judges were heavily influenced by demagogism in the courtroom, and the Eastern justice system of khadis, which was dominated by exaggerations of both parties involved plus the individual opinion of the judge, in ancient Rome civic lawsuits were processed within the framework of

14 Weber, Max 1927: 322-323. Beside the „Council of Antioch”, Christian tradition lists the apostolic Council of Jerusalem as a conference in the history of the early Church where it was resolved that baptised pagans can be full members of the Church. (*Holy Bible, Acts of the Apostles, 15.*)

15 Within the archetype of the „Western city”, Weber makes further differences. He presented the features of ancient and medieval city development with a detailed analysis of similarities and divergences as well as the characteristics which he believed to have been the predecessors of modern economy.

16 Weber, Max 1927: 342.

a bound procedure: „...the praetor appointed an iudex to whom he gave strict instructions as to the conditions requiring a judgment against the accused or the throwing out of the case. Under Justinian the Byzantine bureaucracy brought order and system into this rational law, in consequence of the natural interest of the official in a law which would be systematic and fixed and hence easier to learn.”¹⁷

After the fall of the Empire, Roman law was organised in Western Europe by Italian notaries, then by lawyers of the new feudal monarchies and also by experts of canon law. Legal development was doubtlessly oriented towards strengthened formal procedures. In the course of the rationalisation of lawsuit procedures „the magical formalism of the German trial fitted in with formalism of Roman law.”¹⁸ Change stemmed from the fact that Bourgeoisie would not accept irrational trials by ordeal as a means to resolve trade disputes. „The Church also, after hesitating at first, ended by adopting the view that such procedure was heathenish and not to be tolerated, and established the canonical procedure on lines as rational as possible.”¹⁹ The rationalisation of legal procedures can be tracked down everywhere in Western Europe. It also spread on to Anglo-Saxon law, even though it is commonplace that England was quite reluctant to adopt institutions of Roman law.

In the formation of modern societies, the well-trained lawyer-official layer played a crucial role. In the 15th and 16th centuries, the rulers of strengthening early modern states gave the highest government offices to humanists with a Greco-Latin schooling. Later, it was definitely the lawyers who were commissioned with running the government. Thus, the management of economy and society gradually came under the rule of rationalistic legal principles, which obviously helped Western Capitalism to unfold.

Weber quoted the organisation of the Chinese Empire as a counterexample to Western state development and bureaucratic order. In his view, the government of the Chinese state retained exactly those characteristics which the Western states successfully discarded. The Chinese official, that is, „the mandarin is primarily a humanistically educated literatus in the possession of a benefice but not in the least degree trained for administration, he knows no jurisprudence but is a fine writer, can make verses, knows the age-old literature of the Chinese and can interpret it”.²⁰ During the existence of the Chinese Empire, there was a period when „humanist” officials were intended to be replaced by skilled bureaucrats, but finally, Mandarin bureaucracy was able to keep their position. Weber linked this fact to the survival and prevalence of a non-rationalistic perspective of reality.

The Chinese way of thinking claimed that the life of the empire was going normally until cosmical harmony, which hinged on the virtues of the Emperor and the officials in this world, suffered harm. Natural disasters and wars stemmed from celestial powers reprimanding people for hurting the world order or perpetrating any immoral deeds. In case the harvest was bad,

17 Weber, Max 1927: 340.

18 Weber, Max 1927: 340.

19 Weber Max 1927: 341. Canon law was interpreted as a peculiar medieval „scene” of modernity by Ghislain Lafont in his concise history of theology, on a Weberian trait, though with a differing explanation. Lafont, Ghislain 1994: *Histoire théologique de l'Église catholique*. Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris.

20 Weber, Max 1927: 338.

the Emperor called for a more stringent poetic examination for Mandarins in order to restore distressed order. This was also a kind of magic. In this relation, the cultural ideals of learned Chinese „Humanist” officials can be more properly understood. The main task of Mandarins was to act in a virtuous way to promote cosmical harmony. So they had to research ancient Chinese wisdoms and literature.²¹

Weber also applied the West-East opposition in his research to differing developments of state and law. As he concluded, „*the state in the sense of the rational state has existed only in the western world.*” In the eastern world „*...the rational state was rather prevented by the persistence of reliance upon magic. In consequence of this fact the power of the clans could not be broken, as happened in the occident through the development of the cities and of Christianity.*”²²

Weber made comparisons of the political and power structures of Eastern empires and Western states. It comprises a significant part of his research. In an attempt to present the differences between the „West” and the „East”, Weber started out from the assumption that the disintegration of empires led to divergent developments in Europe and in Asia. In order to describe the discrepancies, he introduced notions of „feudal” and „prebendal” systems. What he called „prebend” is the state official’s right to benefit from taxes or duties of state estates in return for carrying out management tasks in the government by commission of the ruler. If a state had relied on such officials, Weber called its political-social system prebendal. In contrast, Weber deemed a system „feudal” if the relation between a lord and a vassal had been regulated by a fealty, and a key element of their contract had been the fief itself. In the prebendal system, the beneficiary was to be regarded as a state official, one who collected and forwarded taxes to the centre of power. The essence of Feudalism on the other hand lay in bond between the lord and the vassal which, under private law, mainly surrogated the public law-based relations retained by prebendalism. That Feudalism had usually been born in times when agriculture had been vital in the life of a community was another considerable difference. Fiefs expressed the nature of political and power relations. In contrast, officials received a share of government revenues in the prebendal system which clearly shows that the role of cities and money in the economy did not fade away completely.

Weber argued that the fall of empires led to feudalisation in the West, and to prebendalisation in the East, especially in India. In Weber’s reasoning, the military factor appeared again as an important argument. In his opinion, the importance of the role of heavy cavalry led to a strengthening of the intermediary layer between the ruler and the farmers in the West which was much greater than that in prebendal systems. Feudalisation thus resulted in the short-term decentralisation of the state. The unity and power structures of Eastern empires did not corrode to such an extent than the ones in early medieval Western Europe. In the long run, however, the layer with prebendal estates was able to exert a more powerful force against centralising efforts. Consequently, Eastern empires never became consolidated enough to promote the development of modern Capitalism adequately.

21 Weber about China: Bendix, Reinhard 1977: 98-141. Hamilton, Gary, G. 1985: *Why no Capitalism in China? Questions in Historical Comparative Research*. In: Buss, Andreas, E. (ed.): *Max Weber in Asian Studies*. E.J. Brill, Leiden, 65-89.

22 Weber, Max 1927: 338-339.

„Western state”, as it evolved from Feudalism, with an existing bureaucracy of a rationalistic legal mind appeared again in Weber’s works, contrastively opposed to the political formation with a universal orientation, the one that dwindled Capitalism. The comparison here, however, was not of the West-East type – Western Capitalism vs. Eastern Empires, although the conclusions seemed to be applicable to all empires in general – instead, it was a comparison of the Roman Empire and Early Modern European states. Weber, comparing the liberties of the Roman Empire and the Medieval City, looked for the effects of the abolition of city rights on the development of Capitalism, with regard to the differing circumstances. As he wrote, *„in antiquity the freedom of the cities was swept away by a bureaucratically organised world empire within which there was no longer a place for political capitalism”*.²³

The decline of urban autonomies and Capitalism is clearly visible throughout the time the Roman Empire rose in power. Emperors gradually abolished various rental systems of tax collection, and tax collectors were intended to be downgraded to mere officials. The abolition of renting out taxes led to the disappearance of the ancient capitalist entrepreneur who was bound to the political elite. Binding the population to the soil had been implemented, and mercenary warfare was replaced by conscripted military. *„The various classes of the population became stratified along occupational lines and the burden of state requirements was imposed on the newly created groups on the principle of joint liability. This development means the throttling of ancient capitalism.”*²⁴ The late Roman state became a strictly centralised bureaucratic state in which ancient Capitalism, once closely connected to political ventures, could no longer find its way.

In late medieval Western Europe, strengthening states also limited the autonomy of the city-dweller Bourgeoisie. The cities there, though, were subjugated by the states which were struggling for hegemony. *„This competitive struggle created the largest opportunities for modern western capitalism.”*²⁵ Since the states were in a constant struggle with each other for natural resources, they had no choice but to foster and nurture their national capitalisms. The alliance between the national states and capital gave birth to a strong Bourgeoisie. Weber concluded *„it is the closed national state which afforded to capitalism its chance for development – and as long as the national state does not give place to a world empire capitalism also will endure”*.²⁶

Weber’s concept of the Empire was the following: it had basically been a centralised political formation with a largely prebendal power structure, which had not supported the development of Capitalism in the long run. Weber argued that Western development had had one essential feature, namely that there had been no other empire after the demise of the Roman Empire. Moreover, in the West, the disintegration of the Empire was much more powerful than in the East, so eventually, the prebendal system became impossible to manage. The rise of Feudalism there had a new feature: an autonomous organisation of a military component was enabled between the central power and the farmers – not unlike in cities where Bourgeoisie developed. It was not rational production which made the feudal system important, but that the power struc-

23 Weber, Max 1927: 335.

24 Weber, Max 1927: 336.

25 Weber, Max 1927: 337.

26 Weber, Max 1927: 337.

ture it created generally allowed an exceptional transition towards modern society and modern statehood.²⁷

Weber described how the framework of the Empire had been dismantled in the West. He constantly compared it to „Eastern characteristics”. However, he did not really make use of the opportunity in his analysis that Eastern prebendal empires and Western Feudalism – with autonomous cities and intermediary layers getting independent from central power – allowed for the setup of a contrast perfectly matching the „classic” opposites of liberty-despotism. Featuring the history of the „West” with a sociologically formulated representation of the „liberty motif” is to be observed in postwar social and historical science, where both Weber’s terminology and his analytical framework were put to an extensive use.

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²⁷ Wallerstein commenced his reasoning about the roots of the capitalistic world order with the Robertsonian – or Weberian – theses of the European collapse of the „Empire” in his book *The Modern World-System*. William Robertson was an eminent representative of the Scottish Enlightenment and historiography in the 18th century. According to him, Charles V was the last monarch who attempted to revive the „Empire” in Europe. After his unsuccessful attempt, the modern state system became incorporated as an organic part into the character of emerging Capitalism. According to Wallerstein, states played a vital role in capitalistic economy and the accumulation of capital. Modern-age regimes, which was the guarantee of European „freedom” according to Robertson, became capitalistic power organisations combatting weaker, peripheral regions in Wallerstein’s depiction. Wallerstein, Immanuel 1974: *The Modern World System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the 16th century*. Academic Press, New York. Chapter I.