

THE SPIRITUAL SOURCE AND NATURE OF THE AUTHORITY

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ABSTRACT

The primary formula of authority is derived from the relationship between creator and creation. In the religious sphere, it connects man to God; in the family sphere, the child to the father; in the political sphere, the individual – inhabitant of a village, city, or country – to the ancestor, king, or ruler. These formulas of creation have also been reproduced in other social institutions: the priest is the religious father of the parish, the teacher-professor holds authority in the eyes of the disciple, the healer-shaman dominates the relationship with the patient. This article explores theoretical arguments from the fields of linguistics, sociology, and anthropology to demonstrate the spiritual nature of the idea of authority and its application up to modernity. As a representation of divinity in human society, as a reconstruction of the founding scenario of the world¹⁷⁴ or as a guarantee of the connection between the living, predecessors and successors, between the human and the divine, of the possible continuity of existence, authority recalls the idea of absolute, indubitable superiority. Only modern economy, accompanied by liberal individualism, rejects spiritual authority – along with the idea of an unmatched superiority – and replaces it with rational authority. The crisis of authority in the postmodern society, triggered by modernity, bureaucracy, and economic rationalism, can be resolved by restoring the spiritual connections between certain types of (non-economic) authority and the sources of divine legitimacy.

Keywords: traditional authority, spirituality, patriarchy, tradition, modernity, rational authority.

1. ÉMILE BENVENISTE AND THE INVESTITURE OF PARENTHOOD IN INDO-EUROPEAN SOCIETIES

European familial culture and the stylistic matrix (in Blaga's terms¹⁷⁵) that it deeply imprinted on the structure of European civilizations are nourished by two primary sources: the matriarchal cult and social order (native, especially strong in the sedentary agrarian civilizations of Old Europe¹⁷⁶) and the values of the patriarchal Indo-European cultures. Matriarchal authority, like matriarchal law,

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¹⁷⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Sacral și profanul [The Sacred and the Profane]*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2000, pp. 63–64.

¹⁷⁵ Lucian Blaga, *Trilogia culturii [Trilogy of Culture]*, Bucharest, Publishing House for Universal Literature, 1967, p. 105.

¹⁷⁶ Marija Gimbutas, *Civilizație și cultură [Civilization and Culture]*, Bucharest, Meridiane Publishing House, 1989.

was rooted in primordial divinities, in earth goddesses. It was not physical strength, bravery, or military ability that formed the basis or justification of the mother's authority. Julius Evola¹⁷⁷ (1998) revisits and builds upon the doctrine of the ages of the world; in his interpretation, after the golden age of the gods who created and populated the world, came the age of silver – the Civilization of the Mother. The center of this civilization is the mythical and metaphysical recognition of the concept of woman “as principle and substance of creation”:

“a goddess expresses the supreme reality, and each being conceived as a son appears, in relation to this goddess, as something without its own life, something perishable, ephemeral”¹⁷⁸.

Society is populated with the sons of women, called in other philosophical, mythological, or literary contexts, *Mume* – prototypes or matrices of all things, the primordial elements of terrestrial existence. In Crete, Evola notes, the native land was not called *patria* (fatherland), but *metris*, the land of the mother. Émile Benveniste, a distinguished linguist and philologist, observed that Indo-European terms related to kinship are among the most stable and well-established in ancient languages, as they are represented in nearly all of them. Indo-European languages preserved the conceptual pair *mater* – the mythical mother and social-family authority – and *anna* – the birthing and nurturing, loving mother. As *mater*, the mother plays a central role in the family; she is a founder figure, defining the relationship of filiation or brotherhood: in Greek, brothers were called *adelphós* or *homogásterios* – womb-sharers, those who come from the same mother, belonging to the same line of descent, subject to the same authority¹⁷⁹. The concept of maternity as a form of spiritual authority that founds the family, society, and assigns statuses was theorized in anthropology by Johann Bachofen (1861), though he is often seen by his exegetes as more of a romantic than a classic in anthropological literature; his method – myth analysis – leads to the formulation of theories regarding spiritual truth, at the cost of neglecting factual truth¹⁸⁰. More recently, Ernst Bergmann, cited by Traian Brăileanu¹⁸¹, called in 1932 for German society to return to matriarchal authority as the natural, primordial foundation of society:

“A people rich in unmotherly (unmütterlich) women, in old maids, prostitutes, scholarly androgynes is ripe (...) for destruction (...). Only that society will

¹⁷⁷ Julius Evola, *Revoltă împotriva lumii moderne [Revolt Against the Modern World]*, Bucharest, Antet Publishing House, 1998, p. 186.

¹⁷⁸ „o zeiță exprimă realitatea supremă și fiecare ființă concepută drept fiu apare față de această zeiță drept ceva lipsit de viață proprie, ceva caduc, efemer”, in *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁹ Émile Benveniste, *Vocabularul instituțiilor indo-europene [Indoeuropean Language and Society]*, Bucharest, Paideia Publishing House, 2020, pp. 179–185.

¹⁸⁰ George W. Stocking, “Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J. J. Bachofen”, in *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 70, No. 6/1968, pp. 1188–1190.

¹⁸¹ Traian Brăileanu, *Teoria comunității omenești [Theory on Human Community]*, Bucharest, Cugetarea – Georgescu Delafras Publishing House, 1941, p. 128.

survive in the centuries to come in which the mother is the crowned or uncrowned queen”¹⁸².

What Bergmann emphasizes is the high price paid for abandoning female-type authority, which celebrated the spiritual power and cult of the woman – a price manifesting in the demographic, biological, and moral degradation of modern populations.

Patriarchy brought with it a different cult, another spiritual source of authority. It was not the mother, but the father who was considered the founder of the family and the community; not birth, but conquest was the revered power. The structure of kinship is centered around an ancestor, around whom all his male descendants and their immediate families are grouped. In general, the Indo-European terms that describe kinship relationships refer primarily to men. The most important term is that of *father* – *pater* (Sanskrit *pitar*, Greek *pater*, Gothic *fadar*), whose dominant usage was mythological. Jupiter, the leader of the great Greek pantheon, is a name derived from a familial designation, namely *Dyes Pater* or *Zeus Pater*. This term did not primarily refer to physical, biological descent, but had a cultural, social, and mythological meaning. From the meaning of *pater* as “founder, civilizer” came the family of terms like *patrius* (an adjectival form referring to what belongs to the father’s world) and *patria* (ancestral place, homeland), which designates the cultural and social space under the father’s jurisdiction (there were no similar derivatives from *mater*). To express the familial sense of filiation, there was the term *atta* (Greek *atta*, Gothic *atta*, Old Slavic *otici*), a form that gave rise in Vedic, Greek, Latin, and Romanian to the word *tata* (“*dad*”) as a childish, affectionate form of address. The meaning of this term was “father who nourishes, who raises” the child. Societies that did not know the meaning of the term *pater* never had a mythology dominated by a father-god (e.g., the Melanesians’ difficulty in assimilating Christianity, in perceiving the divinity as a Father-God), and they never knew a patriarchal form of organization¹⁸³.

Authority was the creative power of the mythical father, the continuer of the cult and the founder of the lineage; as the first initiate into the cult of the supreme god, he would recreate or support the god’s creative effort. In the absence of this power – manifested as authority – the world was in danger of disappearing or falling into chaos.

2. PATRIARCHAL ABSOLUTISM

In the ancient world, the family was composed of one or more cores that included fathers, mothers, children, and slaves. Authority belonged to the first

¹⁸² „Un popor bogat în femei nemale (unmütterlich), în fete bătrâne, prostituate, androgine savante e copt (...) pentru pieire. Numai acel popor va trăi în secolele viitoare în care mama este regina încoronată sau neîncoronată”, in *Ibidem*.

¹⁸³ Émile Benveniste, *quoted work*, pp. 173–178.

father or the eldest among the men. However, he was only a representative, a “delegate”, the bearer of a power that was granted to him from beyond himself, beyond his limited worldly existence. The power he held over others (even the power of life and death) had a sacred connotation and was not justified by his personal merits or qualities. The true source of his authority was the sovereign god of the household religion, whom the Greeks invoked through the sacred hearth (*Hestia Despoina*), and the Romans through *Lar familiae pater* (the Lar, or father of the family). This figure was most often a mythical ancestor – the sacred founder of that lineage – a god, a demigod, or a deified hero. Before being the leader of the earthly family, the patriarch was the successor of mythical ancestors and a future ancestor himself. He was tasked with serving and ensuring that the current generation did not fall beneath the dignity of their forebears or betray the mission entrusted to them. He was responsible for maintaining the household religion and the sacred fire – he was the pontiff of the family’s religion. As patriarch (“the eldest father”), he united the roles of supreme magistrate, military leader, king, and priest. Fustel de Coulanges describes the fulfillment of this final role – priesthood – as the most important within the ancient family:

“In all religious ceremonies, he performs the highest function; he slaughters the animal for sacrifice; his mouth utters the prayer that must draw the protection of the gods upon himself and his kin. Through him, the family and the cult continue; he alone represents the entire line of descendants. The domestic cult is based on him; he could almost say, like the Hindu: *I am God*. When death comes, he will become a divine being whom his descendants will invoke”¹⁸⁴.

Filial piety formed the foundation of domestic and civic morality in China as well. According to Marcel Granet¹⁸⁵, in Chinese society, respect for paternal authority represents the most important social obligation. The spiritual authority, the sacerdotal function of the head of a cult group, or the patriarchal status of the father is transmitted to the firstborn son, without being shared with anyone else – just as in the families of ancient European societies (as noted by Aries and Duby).

Authority is established religiously, through the cult of the kinship group, not merely through familial ties:

“The hierarchy that characterizes the noble family is founded on the establishment of ancestor worship, and not on any natural authority stemming from biological fatherhood”¹⁸⁶.

¹⁸⁴ „În toate ceremoniile religioase el este cel ce îndeplinește cea mai înaltă funcție; taie animalul pentru sacrificiu; gura sa rostește formula de rugă ce trebuie să atragă asupra sa și asupra alor săi protecția zeilor. Familia și cultul continuă prin el; el reprezintă prin sine însuși întregul șir al descendenților. Cultul casnic se bazează pe el; aproape c-ar putea spune precum hindusul: Eu sunt Zeul. Când va veni moartea, el va fi o ființă divină pe care urmașii o vor invoca”, in Fustel de Coulanges, *Cetatea antică [The Ancient City]*, Bucharest, Meridiane Publishing House, 1984, p. 126.

¹⁸⁵ Marcel Granet, *Civilizația chineză [Chinese Thought]*, Bucharest, Nemira Publishing House, 2000.

¹⁸⁶ „Ierarhia care caracterizează familia nobiliară are drept principiu stabilirea cultului strămoșilor și nu o autoritate naturală, rezultând din faptul paternității”, in *Ibidem*, p. 311.

Paternal authority was therefore based on the sacredness that the father, as a future ancestor, would receive after death, but which he anticipates during his lifetime. According to the model of Chinese religious thought, he represents the sky, the principle of absolute sovereignty, and has the right to command his sons just as *yang* commands *yin*. The head of the cult or patriarch, in his role as the family priest, has a series of obligations from which he derives his superiority, and which stem from his complete adherence to ritual prescriptions: cleanliness, guaranteed by noble conduct and knowledge of rituals, techniques, and ceremonial language; sincerity; and discipline. His main duty as the leader of a religious (cultic) group is to perform sacrifices in honor of the ancestors. The authority of a patriarch or cult leader is determined by the number of ancestors for whom he can offer sacrifices: the more they are, the greater his prestige as their successor.

The rituals that meticulously regulate the paternal relationship seem to establish a connection more similar to what we know about the institution of vassalage than to the idea of filiation. Simple fatherhood, without the public ceremonies of adoption of the son (present in both ancient European and Chinese families), does not, in itself, generate a bond different from that which links the father to any of the descendants of the kinship group's lineages to which he belongs. The ceremonies of encounter between father and son are subject to the ritual character of the relationship, defined by Granet as "artificial kinship". Part of the ritual of recognizing the son involved the "offering of the soul" and was rooted in the warrior logic of the time: in order to bestow a name upon his child, the father had to kill an enemy, whose head he would bury under the threshold. The name of the victim (and their soul, their vital force) would be passed on to the newborn who, once having received this gift from the father, would belong to him as a son. From that moment, maternal rights remained in the shadow of paternal ones: if the mother provided the matter, the father was the one who gave life to it. The father, it was said, is the one who teaches his children to laugh and gives them the superior soul (*hun*), which is added to the inferior soul (*po*) which they are born with, the soul of the blood¹⁸⁷.

The most important education for the young was honoring their parents and preparing them for death. The father's death had to be prepared for starting at the age of 70 – the age of withdrawal from public life. What followed was a "preparation stage" for death, which was meant to last as long as possible (the ideal period was estimated at 30 years). This preparation was extremely important for the one who was to become a venerated ancestor, the center of his family's cult. Integration into the family beyond, into the group of ancestors, was always done under the protection of the deceased's grandfather and only took place after completing a kind of "adjustment stage" (a purification period), corresponding to the mourning period that had to be attended to by the descendants. The family's authority structure, the hierarchical relationships, continued even after death: the

¹⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 315.

one who had occupied a subordinate position in the family group during life remained subordinate during his ancestral career as well. Between the two branches of the family – the one here and the one beyond death – there was no separation, but continuity: between the living and the dead, there was a constant exchange of services, mediated by the leaders of the two groups¹⁸⁸.

3. VASSALAGE – INFERIORITY WITHOUT RESENTMENT

Marc Bloch writes, in his well-known study about the feudal society¹⁸⁹, how in the Middle Ages, the hierarchy developed on the material foundation of the fief and on the obligations established by it is vassalage. The ritual of vassalic homage finds its oldest form in the placing of the vassal's joined hands into those of the lord; starting in the 10th century, the gesture was accompanied by a kiss on the mouth. The name of this ritual act – *hommage-homme* – literally designates the act of “being someone's man”, a bond similar to that of family, of social or spiritual kinship.

The obligations of the one who entrusted himself (*se commendait*) to a protector were called “service” (*servitium* – from Latin *servio*, “to be a slave”). During the Merovingian dynasty, freedom meant, above all, belonging, as a direct member, to the people ruled by the Merovingian sovereigns, the *populus Francorum*; the synonymy of *franc-free* would last. Although, like marriage, vassalage formally ended with the death of the two lives it united, in practice, it became hereditary. It came to be the prerogative of a privileged class:

“Vassalage was the form of dependence specific to the upper classes, which were distinguished above all by their warrior vocation and their calling to command”¹⁹⁰.

It is the form of social kinship that succeeds the Roman *clientela*, but it is subject to the logic of a warrior society, dominated by political ambitions; it is based on a hierarchy ordered according to the principle of patriarchal-seniorial authority and protection.

“As in ancient Rome, the young man of good family who wanted to make a place for himself in the world would entrust himself to a person of high rank – unless, indeed, his future had already been secured in this way since childhood by a farsighted father”¹⁹¹, says Marc Bloch.

The specific form of vassalage characteristic of feudal society is represented by the “household warriors”; however, the earliest form of this institution is

¹⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 312–333.

¹⁸⁹ Marc Bloch, *Societatea feudală [Feudal Society]*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia Publishing House, 1996.

¹⁹⁰ „Vasalitatea era forma de dependență proprie claselor superioare, pe care le distingeau înainte de toate vocația războinică și cea de comandă”, in *Ibidem*, p. 163.

¹⁹¹ „Ca odinioară la Roma, tânărul de familie bună care dorea să-și facă un loc în lume se încredința unei persoane de rang înalt, dacă nu cumva viitorul său fusese deja asigurat în acest mod, încă din copilărie, de către un tată prevăzător”, in *Ibidem*, p. 166.

described as early as the 1st century by Tacitus, who observed it among the Germanic peoples. The terminological succession *vassal* – *valet* – *young boy* – *puer* – *domestic slave* more accurately reflects the evolution of this type of relationship, which is comparable to that of paternity.

Seigniorial or royal authority in premodern societies derives from the authoritarian patriarchal model. It is simultaneously religious, cultural, and familial in nature. According to Frédéric Le Play¹⁹², paternal authority is the most necessary and most legitimate form of social power. Without being a social institution in the true sense of the word, it emanates from the very nature of man – of the man, the woman, or the child. As such, it constitutes the foundation and the principle of the family.

In the case of smaller-scale societies, with low population numbers, familial organization and patriarchal authority are sufficient to ensure social stability. In materially and demographically large, highly developed societies – such as modern ones – these two foundational elements have been replaced by complex structures of formally or rationally legitimized social authority. In any case, no society has been able to bypass or ignore this familial-patriarchal stage of organization and authoritative exercise without violating the most evident laws of physical nature and human moral order. The civil laws that immediately followed the old patriarchal customs – by imposing respect and obedience from children toward their parents – are self-sustaining to the extent that they merely reinforce natural paternal authority. For this natural authority to retain its strength, it is enough that legal authority (civil law) does not formally oppose it.

According to the same author cited above, the father has, before the smaller or larger family he leads, the mission of continuing the principal work of creation – by reproducing the only human model capable of moral sentiment and of rising to the knowledge of God. For this reason, he is invested with the highest social function, which, as Le Play argues, is even superior to that of the sovereign – whose role is to govern a society he did not create. The authority associated with this function derives from this natural status and from the father's primary role: that of ensuring the existence of women and children, not so much in material terms, but within a publicly instituted and religiously consecrated order.

Given the responsibilities of the father, it is necessary that the law or social customs grant him powers equal to those responsibilities. First and foremost, he needed to have free disposal over the possessions that ensured subsistence; secondly, inheritance rights should not reward descendants with social advantages if they had not fulfilled their duties toward their parents or proven their devotion to the lineage. The societies in which patriarchal authority has retained its distinctive features are traditionalist ones. We refer here to medieval societies, but also to rural communities and certain societies with a strongly conservative character – such as the English one. It is generally acknowledged – and Le Play emphasizes this – that

¹⁹² Louis Baudin, *Frédéric Le Play: Textes choisis [Frédéric Le Play: Selected Works]*, Paris, Librairie Dalloz, 1947.

in England the family constitutes the true social unit and the foundation of any national or political structure. (The English term *home* means both “house” and “homeland”). Moreover, in England, denying the father the exercise of firm authority is equivalent to denying the sovereign the right to command public force. Civil liberty develops here hand in hand with paternal authority, and in order to keep both paths open, the English appeal to religion, law, and public opinion. In France, by contrast, as Le Play demonstrates, paternal authority finds support neither in religion – which has been continually undermined since the end of the 17th century – nor in civil law, which, after 1793, withdrew the trust that had been invested for centuries in the head of the family, nor in public opinion. The old age and wisdom of the family’s father, who can no longer keep his sons close to pass on his experience, are ignored through his premature withdrawal from public or productive life. The French Revolution had disastrous consequences at the level of the family: the collapse of the paternal community, the severing of the bond between family and tradition, and the rise of individualist ideologies.

4. THE AUTHORITY OF AUTHORITIES: RATIONAL AND DECEPTIVE

In the sense that Frédéric Le Play had described the origin and nature of authority, it is synonymous with dignity: it does not mean the power to dispose of something, but rather “that external force exercised with the purpose of ensuring of the inferior one’s welfare”, as defined by Ferdinand Tönnies¹⁹³. The authority of the father contains a triple nature and is the source of authority found in social contexts outside the family: 1) It is an authority of age (of the elderly), which makes judgment and the experience of equity possible; 2) It is an authority of strength (ducal), of leaders, which makes courage, power in confrontation, decision-making, and the ability to guarantee security in the face of danger possible; 3) It is also a spiritual authority (priestly), of wisdom. The most important manifestation and mission of authority is, of course, the spiritual one:

“The authority of wisdom rises above the others as a sacerdotal authority in which it is believed that God Himself is present among the living”¹⁹⁴.

Parents become patriarchs, patriarchs become ancestors, and ancestors become gods:

“They themselves, in their role as parents and judges, are masters and rulers, educators and teachers, the bearers and symbols of all forms of human authority”¹⁹⁵.

¹⁹³ Ferdinand Tönnies, *Comunitate și societate [Community and Society]*, Craiova, Beladi Publishing House, 2016, p. 62.

¹⁹⁴ „Autoritatea înțelepciunii se ridică deasupra celorlalte ca autoritate sacerdotală în care se crede că Dumnezeu însuși este prezent printre cei vii”, in *Ibidem*, p. 66.

¹⁹⁵ „Ei înșiși sunt, în calitate de părinți și judecători, stăpâni și conducători, educatori și măestri, purtătorii și simbolurile tuturor formelor de autoritate umană”, in *Ibidem*, p. 67.

With the rationalization, industrialization, bureaucratization, and modernization of societies, the old forms of authority no longer have their place. The nature of the new organizational groups requires a new type of power, which, instead of achieving unity and continuity within the community centered around the cult, breaks it up and separates interests, needs, and people. A new type of authority is also being projected. Bureaucracy, as defined by Max Weber as a rigid structure whose emergence is linked to modernity, establishes the practice of rational-legal domination, considered superior to other types of domination, at least in terms of effectiveness. The characteristics of bureaucracy are that: a) authority is part of a legal, rational order that it seeks to apply, b) the competences, rights, and obligations of each person are established by rules, c) functions are hierarchically organized, d) qualification is the rule for accessing a function, e) qualifications are certified through training and evaluation systems, f) the leadership function is separate from ownership of the means of production, g) written procedure is predominant in the daily conduct of actions¹⁹⁶.

Research conducted in Europe and the United States¹⁹⁷ has found that the bureaucratic rule allows for remote control; it reduces interpersonal relationships, limits the arbitrariness of leadership, and legitimizes sanctions. It leads to a higher level of apathy and enables hierarchical negotiation. Rational, non-spiritual authority is not that of the creator, but of the one who wins. It no longer requires initiation, but a thorough understanding of the rules of the game in which all members of society must be engaged. It does not lead out of love and devotion to gods, ancestors, and descendants, but out of devotion to rules and methods.

The regimes of rational authority are under the dual tension of conformity to forms and the fear of revolt. Alexis de Tocqueville notes the momentum of Anglo-Saxon democratic societies, societies of free people who organize without coercion for the public good. Political power here adopts the idea of effective authority, which ensures the material happiness of society, demanding to be “the sole agent and the only arbiter of this happiness”¹⁹⁸. Such an authority, subjected to welfare and order, is concerned with relieving its citizens of any worries about thinking and any hardships of living, as Theodore Dalrymple, a lucid critic of the forms of authority of the Western welfare state shows. For this reason, the will of man must be “softened, bent, and directed”; people will not be forced to act, but prevented from doing so; the government will not destroy but will anticipate a plenary human existence. It will not tyrannize, but “will numb, weaken, and fool a society”¹⁹⁹.

¹⁹⁶ Erhard Friedberg, „Organizația” [“Organization”] in Raymond Boudon, *Tratat de Sociologie [Treatise of Sociology]*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1997, p. 424.

¹⁹⁷ Alvin Gouldner, 1954, 1955; Michel Crozier, 1961, 1964.

¹⁹⁸ „unicul agent și singurul arbitru al acestei fericiri”, in Theodore Dalrymple, *Cultura noastră: ce a mai rămas din ea [Our Culture: What's Left of It]*, Bucharest, Contra Mundum Publishing House, 2020, p. 34.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

Tocqueville's prophecy is confirmed almost a century later, when the pragmatists at Cambridge, through the voice of John Dewey, said:

“Let the will of the state manifest itself in place of the will of the individual. Let an institution be created whose objective is to keep the correct doctrines in the attention of the people, their perpetual reiteration, and the inoculation of them in the minds of the young, while at the same time having the power to prevent the propagation of contrary doctrines and to avoid the teaching, support, or even expression of them”²⁰⁰.

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²⁰⁰ „Să se manifeste voința statului în locul voinței individului. Să se creeze o instituție al cărei obiectiv să fie menținerea în atenția poporului a doctinelor corecte, reiterarea lor perpetuă și inocularea lor în mințile tinerilor, având în același timp puterea de a preîntâmpina propagarea doctinelor contrare și de a evita predarea, susținerea și chiar exprimarea lor”, in John Taylor Gatto, *Arme de instrucție în masă [Weapons of Mass Instruction]*, Bucharest, Anacronic Publishing House, 2018, p. 216.