the epitaphs have only been ture concerned with the his
In order to understand the epitaphs of Gao-Saney, we have
Their outstanding document. derives from the fact that
belonging to the Almoravid period in the epitaphs are Arabic
identifications with African names for the rulers of Gao-Saney, be
absence of any corresponding unsubstantiated. Other arabic
mentioned belonged to a different ethnic identity: were they the
were they Songhay or Sonni?

Yet, the epitaphs of Gao-Saney demand more attention. Mainly three royal line identification. These commemorated:
Abd Allah who died in 476
503 AH/1110 AD and
in 503 AH/1110 AD and
503 AH/1110 AD and
The first and third epitaphs with the names quite out of context.

25 Lange, "Rois de Gao-Saney, or Gao", 25-26; Hunwick, Timbuctu, 414.
26 Sauvaget, "Épitaphes royaux du Gourou de Moraes Faria, in fact called Zuwa (Timbuktu) for the sake of clarity the pres-chronicles and the second dynasty of the late kings of the stela with kings of the stela with remains obscure: Were they the Sane", 264-269; de Moraes Faria
29 Sauvaget, "Épitaphes royaux de Gao-Saney", 4, 13a).

19 Without referring to camels, al-Bakri mentions that in Ghana the salt was taxed on the basis of donkey-loads (Levtzion/Hopkins, Corpus, 81).
20 Al-Maghili refers to the warlike Saghay who fought against the different sultans of Saghay (Ait alu Aitkay in: Hunwick, Short's a, 14/tt. 70).
22 Hunwick, "Gao revisited", 251-273; Lange, "From Mande", 275-301.
23 Delafosse, Haut-Senegal II, 60-72; Rouch, Contribution, 251.
24 Tringham, History, 28-87; Fage, History, 76-77; Levtzion, "Sahara and Sudan", 677-679; Cuq, Histoire, 134; Hunwick, Timbuctu, XXV, XXXIII-XXXVI.

1. The Zal/Zaghè of Gao-Saney and the Almoravids

The ongoing re-evaluation of Songhay history is mainly based on the twelfth century epitaphs of Gao-Saney. Discovered just before the Second World War, they were unknown to Maurice Delafosse and they were left aside by the less philologically-minded Jean Rouch. Owing to a lack of convincing evidence from these epitaphs, most historians, including John Hunwick, still follow the writings of Delafosse and Rouch on major points of ancient Gao history. The reason for the neglect of the epitaphs is simple: until recently, none of the royal names provided by them could be satisfactorily equated with the rulers of available king lists and therefore their historical meanings remained obscure. My recent propositions on

salt was apparently first transported by donkeys, its trade likewise benefited from the introduction of the camel.19

On the basis of these arguments, there is no need to locate the origins of the Gao kingdom closer to the main lands of the Songhay. In fact, as we shall see, a critical analysis of the Arabic sources shows that Gao was at the centre of political developments on the eastern Niger bend - although there are a number of diverging interpretations with respect to the available sources. Furthermore, the Songhay factor could not have been of great significance in the early history of the Gao kingdom since Arab authors did not mention the name Songhay before the end of the fifteenth century.20 Instead, a number of testimonies suggest that Mandé people, coming from the west, extended their influence on the Gao kingdom prior to the emergence of the Songhay in the east.21 This question of ethnicity is closely connected to the dynastic history of Gao and hence to the ethnic identity of the three successive ruling houses: the Zal, the Sonni and the Askia. Ten years ago, the ethnic composition of the Gao kingdom was the subject of debate between John Hunwick and myself.22 More recent research will hopefully bring the issues involved into better focus.

Ancient Kingdoms: States of the Middle Niger
the epitaphs have only been partly taken into consideration in the recent literature concerned with the history of the Niger bend. 25

In order to understand the difficulties involved in interpreting the royal epitaphs of Gao-Saney, we have to briefly consider the main features of these texts. Their outstanding documentary importance for the history of the Middle Niger derives from the fact that they provide the names of three successive rulers belonging to the Almoravid period. However, since most of the names mentioned in the epitaphs are Arabic cover names, it is difficult to establish direct correlations with African names from the local sources. Several scholars supposed that the rulers of Gao-Saney, being qualified as malik "king", were the Zâ but in the absence of any correspondence with the royal lists of Songhay this remained unsubstantiated. 26 Other authors adopted the opposing position that the kings mentioned belonged to a different dynasty. 27 The next question concerns their ethnic identity: were they Berbers or black Africans and if the latter is correct, were they Songhay or Soninke? 28

Yet, the epitaphs of Gao-Saney contain several African names deserving special attention. Mainly three royal epitaphs are relevant with respect to the problem of identification. These commemorate three kings: Abû `Abd Allâh Muhammad b. `Abd Allâh who died in 494 AH/1100 AD, Abû Bakr b. Abî Qubâsâ who died in 503 AH/1110 AD and `Umar b. al-Khattâb who died in 514 AH/1120 AD. 29 The first and third epitaph mention in the third position after the two Arabic names quite out of context the African name Zâghi or Zâghay (the spelling Zâghè

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26 Sauvaget, "Épitaphec royales", 429; Trimingham, History, 90 n. 1; Cuoghi, Histoire, 136. Hunwick and de Moraes Farias correctly argue that the dynasty traditionally called Zâ should in fact be called Zuwâ (Timbuktu, 5 n. 49, 352; Inscriptions, XXIII, §§ 422-423). However, for the sake of clarity the present essay continues to refer to the first dynasty of the Timbuktu chronicles and the second dynasty of Gao as the Zâ. Indeed, in spite of the identity of the Zâghè kings of the stelae with the Zâ of the chronicles, the identity of the Zuwâ of the stela remains obscure: Were they a dynasty, a ruling group or a clan? (cf. Lange, "Rois de Gao-Sané", 264-269; de Moraes Farias, Inscriptions, §§ 422-423).

27 Hunwick, "Gao revisited", 429-430; id., Timbuktu, XXXV-XXXVI; de Moraes Farias, Inscriptions, §§ 99, 401-403.


29 Sauvaget, "Épitaphes royales", 419-435; de Moraes Farias, Inscriptions, 3-8, 15-16 (n° 1, 4, 13a).
corresponding to a middle position). However, it should be noted that the name occurs again on the royal epitaph of Fandā b. Arbāni b. Zāghi who died in 1203 AD. In view of the chronological depth of at least one century between the first two and the latter inscription there can be no doubt that we are dealing here with an important ancestral figure. In the absence of any other common name, Zāghi can be taken as the dynastic name of the kings attested by the epitaphs and for the intermediate rulers for whom there are no epigraphic testimonies. There are five arguments in favour of an identity between the Zāghi and the Zā.

The first argument concerns the ancestor of both series of royal names. Leaving apart the Islamically inspired reference to Yemen, the T. al-Sūdān begins with Zakay and T. al-Fattāsh with Ouadāt. These forms may be compared with Zāghay or Zāghi (Zāghi) of the Gao-Saney inscriptions. As De Moraes Farias insightfully argues, these names, provided by two different categories of sources, seem to correspond to attempts to transcribe the name of one and the same apical ancestor who was not a local ruler.

A second argument concerns the similarity of a double name. Indeed, in his epitaph the third ruler of Gao-Saney is, besides his Arabic name, also designated by an African name referring to himself and to his father. Unfortunately, the African name was misread by the editor of the royal epitaphs as Māmā b. Kīmā. On the basis of a photograph of the epitaph it was later established that the personal name of the ruler should not be read Māmā but either Bāmā, Tāmā, Lāmā, Nāmā or Yāmā. These variations are explained by the absence of diacritical points in the Kufic script of the epitaphs. Taking the name Nāmā which refers to a queen who died 550 AH/1155 AD as a paradigm, the editor chose Nāmā as the most likely vocalisation. However, it is more appropriate to base the reading of the royal name on the male name of the Prince Yāmā Kūri, who died in 663 AH/1265 AD. Considering Yāmā b. Kīmā to be the correct name of the third Zāghi king of Gao, this identifies him as the eighteenth king of the Zā called

39 Ibn Khurradadhībī mentions south of Morocco the land of Zāghi b. Zāghi (Levization/ Hopkines, Corpus, 17).
40 De Moraes Farias, "Du nouveau", 520-521; id., Inscriptions, 24-25 (n° 23). The clearly written final ya of Zāghi excludes an imāla and suggests the readings Zāghi and Zāghay (here shortened to Zāghi).
42 De Moraes Farias, Inscriptions, §§ 434-435.
43 Sauvaget, "Notes préliminaires", 7; id., "Épitaphe royales", 432-433.
44 Viré, "Note sur trois epitaphes", 375. For the translations of the third epitaph see Sauvaget, "Épitaphe royales", 433.
45 While Sauvaget hesitated between the reading Bāmā and Nāmā ("Épitaphe royales", 438), de Moraes Farias established that Yāmā was correct ("Du nouveau sur les stèles", 515-517).

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Biyu-Ḳi-Kīmā by the T. al-Sūdān and Yama-Kītsi the T. al-Fattāsh. The name of the inscription should be read Yāmā b. Kīmā. The identification of Yāmā b. Kīmā as the eighteenth ruler of the Zā is further supported by the chronological position of both figures. Counting back three reigns from Yama-Kītsi, we reach the sixteenth ruler of the T. al-Fattāsh called Kusoy- or Kēsoy-Dārē who, on account of his name and a possible change of his residence (as we shall later see), appears to be the same as the preceding Kusoy- or Kēsoy-Muslim, the first Muslim king of the Zā dynasty. According to the T. al-Fattāsh, the inhabitants of Gao adopted Islam before the

37 Al-Ṣaʿādi, T. al-Sūdān.
38 Lange, "Rois de Gao", gives the different possibilities.
39 Lange, "Rois de Gao", Koto-Muslim/Koto-Dārē.
40 Ibn al-Muḵtār, T. a.
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the first century between the first
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As de Morais Farias
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the absence of diacritical
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and to base the reading
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name of the third
king of the Za called
Zaghe Zaghed (Levrion/
24-25 (n. 23). The clearly
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justicier historique, NH), 332.
2-433.
of the third epitaph sec
Zamah ("Epiraphes royaux,
veau sur les stèles", 515-

Chart 16: Epitaph of the third
eruler of Gao-Saney – Yamah b.
Kimah b. Zaghed (503-514 AH;
1110-1120 AD)

Biyu-Ki-Kima by the T. al-
Sudan and Yama-Kitsi by
the T. al-Fattah.37 Hence
the name of the inscription
should be read Yamah b.
Kimah.38 The identification
of Yamah b. Kimah with
the eighteenth ruler of the
Za is further supported by
the chronological position
of both figures. Counting
back three reigns from
Yama-Kitsi, we reach the
sixteenth ruler of the Za
called Kusoy- or Koto-
Dare who, on account of
his name and a radical
change of his residence (as
we shall later see), appears
to be the same as the pre-
ceding Kusoy- or Koto-
Muslim, the first Muslim
king of the Za dynasty.39
According to the T. al-
Fattah, the inhabitants
of Gao adopted Islam between
471/1078-9 and 475/1082-3.40 This chronological
closeness between the first Zaghed and the first Muslim king of the Za suggests

38 Levrion, "Rois de Gao-Saney", 264-269; id., "From Mandé", 276-281. De Morais Farias
gives the different possible readings of the name Kam (inscriptions, 16).
39 Levrion, "Rois de Gao-Saney", 258-269. On the duplication of Kusoy/Kusoy-Dare and
Koto-Musulim/Koto-Dare see Lange, "Chute", 162.
40 Ibn al-Mukhtir, T. al-Fattah (NH), 332-333.
that these two are identical. The reign of the first king of the Zâghë in Gao therefore lasted between 19 and 23 years.\footnote{Five earlier inscriptions for commoners discovered in Gao-Saney dated between 1042 and 1095 AD show that the Zâghë kings relied on an earlier local tradition of epigraphs (de Morais Farias, Inscriptions, 31-37).}

A third argument is based on the Arabic loan names of the epitaphs. As previous scholars observed, the names of the first three Zâghë kings of Gao-Saney correspond exactly to the names of the Prophet Muhammad and his two successors, the Caliphs 'Umar and Abu Bakr.\footnote{Sauvaget, "Notes préliminaires", 6-7; id., "Épitaphes royales", 434; Cuq, Histoire, 135-136.} Kings of the desert edge who adopted the names of the Prophet and the first two Caliphs must have considered themselves to be the first Islamic rulers of Gao. This is precisely what the Târîkhës assert with respect to the fifteenth king of the Zâ, Kuso or Koeto Muslim with the succeeding Kusoy-Dârë being – as we have seen - probably the same person. Although the Zâghë and the Zâ pretended to have been preceded by pagan rulers, we know that both lines of rulers succeeded to Muslims.\footnote{Evidence provided by al-Muhammad and al-Bakr in: Levitzin/Hopkins, Corpus, 174, 87.} Therefore the two lines of rulers share the important characteristic of distinguishing themselves on false grounds as Muslims from their pagan predecessors.\footnote{While earlier historians considered the Zâ to have been Berbers (Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal, I, 192; Rouch, Contribution, 169-179) it is now generally thought that they were Songhay (Fage, History, 80; Cuq, Histoire, 134; Hunwick, Shari'a, 5).}

A fourth argument builds again on the identity of names. A Kufic epitaph of Gao-Saney commemorates the death of 'A'isha, daughter of King Kûri, who died in 1117 AD. It has been suggested that King Kûri is identical to Diata-Korë and Kû-Kuray, the last or the last but one pre-Islamic king of the Zû mentioned by the T. al-Fâtâsh and the T. al-Sûdân.\footnote{Ibn al-Mukhtar, T. al-Fâtâsh (NH), 332; al-Sâdî, T. al-Sûdân, 31tr. 5; Tringham, History, 90 n. 1; Lange, "Rois de Gao-Sanë", 262.} If we consider that the first Islamic king of the Zà, the first or the second successor of Diata-Korë/Kû-Kuray, came to power between 1078/9 and 1082/3, it is not unlikely that his daughter died about 1117 AD and thus outlived her father by at least 37 years.

A fifth argument has to do with the identity of a late thirteenth century king of Gao. Indeed, it would appear that the ruler Fandâ b. Arbîn b. Zâghî of the epitaphs, who died in 1203 AD in Gao-Saney, is the same as the 22nd king of the Zà. The latter is called Fanda-Diaraa by the T. al-Fâtâsh and Tib by the T. al-Sûdân.\footnote{Ibn al-Mukhtar, T. al-Fâtâsh (NH), 332-333; al-Sâdî, T. al-Sûdân, 31tr. 5.} If we consider that the reign of Yasoib, the 27th king of the Zà, ended towards 1300 AD, it appears that from Hûnâbontâ-Kodam/Abû Bakr to Fanda/

Chart 17: Kings of the 22nd to 26th Zâghë dynasty of Gao

Fandâ six kings reigned for a period of 103 years, while from Fandâ/Fanda to Yasoib five kings reigned for a period of 97 years. As the average age of 17.2 years in the first period compares well with the average of 19.4 years in the second period, it is quite likely that the Fandâ of the stele is indeed identified with the Fanda-Diaraa of the list of the Zà.

Having established the identity of the succession of kings claiming descent from the same ancestor, the earliest belonging to the second half of the eleventh century and the latest to the beginning of the thirteenth century, it is clear that the dynasty, clearly, the Fandâ dynasty.\footnote{De Morais Farias then the dualistic system of rulerhip (Inscriptions, §§ 400-402) aspects similar to my discussion.} Therefore, the speculations about seventh century origins, the twelfth century successions and the connections.

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The Zaghê in Gao thereafter.

The epitaphs. As prescribed the kings of Gao-Saney and his two successors, who adopted the title of the Zaghê dynasty. The Tariikh al-Fattâsh assert with the preceding period of the Timbuktu Empire, although the two lines of rulers were never the same person. Although the two lines of rulers, we know them as the Zaï challenge the validity of the two lines of rulers on false grounds.

A Kufic epitaph of the late thirteenth century King Kūrī, who died in 1281, is inscribed to the last Islamic king of Gao, Kuray, who died about 1117.

The late thirteenth century inscription of King B. Arbâni b. Zâghi of Gao mentions a king as the 22nd king of the Zaï dynasty. The Zaï and Tib are divided into the first Islamic kings of Gao. The Zâghi dynasty, and the Zaghê dynasty of the Zaï, ended with B. Arbâni b. Abû Bakr to Fanda/ Fandiya Dinar, who died about 1117.

The inscription is dated between 1042 and 1062. The identification of the Zaï dynasty is based on the epitaphs (de Mores Farias, 135; Hopkins, Corpus, 174, B7; 175, B2; Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal, 224; 225; 226; 227; Tringham, Histories, 310; 311). The Zaï dynasty was the first Islamic dynasty of Gao, and the Zaghê dynasty was the second Islamic dynasty of Gao. The Zaï dynasty was the first Islamic dynasty of Gao, and the Zaghê dynasty was the second Islamic dynasty of Gao. The Zaï dynasty was the first Islamic dynasty of Gao, and the Zaghê dynasty was the second Islamic dynasty of Gao. The Zaï dynasty was the first Islamic dynasty of Gao, and the Zaghê dynasty was the second Islamic dynasty of Gao. The Zaï dynasty was the first Islamic dynasty of Gao, and the Zaghê dynasty was the second Islamic dynasty of Gao. The Zaï dynasty was the first Islamic dynasty of Gao, and the Zaghê dynasty was the second Islamic dynasty of Gao. 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The identity of these kings is not clear. It is not clear whether these kings were members of one and the same dynasty. Clearly, the Zaï dynasty was not subordinate to the Zaghê dynasty. Therefore, the identity of the Zaghê dynasty and the Zaï dynasty should be distinguished from these dynasties ruling for a short period at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The Zaï dynasty was the first Islamic dynasty of Gao, and the Zaghê dynasty was the second Islamic dynasty of Gao. Inversely, it has to be admitted that the Zaï dynasty was a specific time of their history had strong foreign connections.

From Ghana and Mali to Songhay. The Mandé Factor in Gao History.

Chart 17: Kings of the Zaï/Zaghê dynasty of Gao

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tariikh al-Siddîn</th>
<th>Tariikh al-Fattâsh</th>
<th>Stele of Gao-Saney</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>al-Ayman</td>
<td>al-Yaman</td>
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<td>Zakay</td>
<td>Outa'ar</td>
<td>Zaïh</td>
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<td>Kû-Kûmû</td>
<td>Diatta-Koré</td>
<td>Kûh</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Kusûy</td>
<td>Kotsu-Musulîm</td>
<td>Abû 'Abîd Allah</td>
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<td>Abû 'Abîd Allah</td>
<td>Muhammad b. Abû</td>
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<td>Abû 'Abîd Allah</td>
<td>Rahîm b. 'Abî</td>
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<td>Kusûy-Darî</td>
<td>Kotsu-Dairî</td>
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<td>Abû Ba'ir</td>
<td>Abû Urahma</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Hûnâbônâ-Kodâm</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Fandî-Dairî</td>
<td>Fandî-Dairî</td>
<td>Fandî b. Aribû</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rise of the Sonni dynasty at the end of the 14th century

First Muslim king of Ghana and first Zaghê king of Gao

Identical kings of the Zaïs and the stele of Gao-Saney

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Sauvaget, "Épitaphes royales", 438; Hunwick, "Gao and Almoravids", 418, 430; Insoll, "Iron Age Gao", 25-26; Hunwick, Timbuktu, XXXV.

De Mores Farias thinks that the "Caliphal period" of Gao was characterized by a rotational system of rulership having resulted from a pact of different powerful groups of the area (Inscriptions, §§ 400-403). His distinction between the earlier and the later mulâk in many aspects similar to my distinction between the Ghana and the Gao Zaghê (ibid., §§ 422, 430).
Who were the kings of the desert edge who dared to take the highly prestigious names of the Prophet and his two successors? One conclusion to be derived from this presumptuousness is that the bearers of these names were not in direct and continuous contact with the Arab world. Indeed, spatial and cultural distance appear to have given the Zaghë kings the idea that they were accomplishing in their own ethnic milieu a task comparable to that of the Prophet and his two successors. The ideosyncrasy of the naming seems to exclude the Zaghë from belonging to the widely travelled Saharan Berbers. Furthermore, no minor kings south of the Sahara would have compared their own achievements to that of the great ancestral figures of Islam. Hence the highly prestigious Islamic loan names adopted by the first three Zaghë rulers imply that they must have been important and well-known kings who, in their own region, could compare their status to that of the Prophet Muhammad and his two successors in the Mediterranean world. The Berbers were in close contact with the Arabs of North Africa and they did not have any tradition of ancient and famous rulers of their own. Therefore, the particularity of the names is more appropriately explained with respect to black Africans of the Sudan than with their Saharan neighbours.

What was the relationship between the Za/Zaghë kings and the Almoravids? Since the first two royal stelae are of white marble and the Kufic writing of their epitaphs exhibits certain characteristics of Andalusian workmanship, it was suggested that they were produced in Almeria in Southern Spain and that the Almoravids were the connecting agents. Moreover, the precise dates of the deaths of two kings and a queen, which must have been known prior to the actual fabrication of the stelae, bear witness of continuous and close relations between Southern Spain and the Middle Niger. The organizational structures necessary for the repeated sending of stelae through the Sahara would not only seem to imply excellent Berber communication across the Sahara but also a certain degree of political influence of the Berbers on the Gao kingdom. On the other hand, the complex arrangements needed for the production and transportation of the stelae also show that the beneficiaries of these efforts were important rulers in their own right and not insignificant subjects of the Almoravids. These and other consider-

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50 Levitzon/Hopkins, 1981.
51 Sauvaget was convinced that the Berbers in the Gao region had been converted to Islam by the Prophet himself, with the arrival of the Army of Conquest in 682 AD.
52 Al-Maghili famous for his contributions to the study of Islamic law, was a prominent author and jurist.
53 Al-Sa’di, T. Al-Sadu, 911-973 AD.
54 Likewise the Fatimids, who ruled Egypt from 969 to 1070 AD, were known for their tolerance and scholarship.
55 Chronological considerations suggest that the Zaghë kingdom reached its apex during the reign of Za al-i-Sufi, who is traditionally regarded as the founder of the dynasty. His reign is dated to the early 12th century AD.
creations imply that the Zaghè were highly renowned black African kings. Besides their boastful association with the most prestigious figures of Islam, the great attention bestowed on them by the Berbers indicates that they were members of a dynasty benefiting from considerable regional fame.

Were the Zâl/Zaghè local kings of Gao? The information provided by Arab geographers clearly shows that prior to the Zaghè the rulers of the Gao kingdom were already Muslim. Al-Muhallabi in the tenth century mentions that the king of Gao "pretends to be a Muslim" and al-Bakri writes towards 1068 that the kingship in Gao was only given to Muslims.53 However, the Zâl/Zaghè were eager to distinguish themselves from their pagan ancestors: the Zaghè kings' adoption of the names of the Prophet Muhammad – Abû ‘Abd Allâh Muhammad b. ‘Abd Allâh – and his two successors, was meant to mark the beginning of a new and Muslim era.54 It is indeed difficult to imagine that Abû ‘Abd Allâh Muhammad had Muslim predecessors of his own dynasty who ruled in Gao. Even more strikingly, the king lists of the Tarîkhîs brand the predecessors of the Muslim Zâ as pagans who should be cursed by Allâh, for none had adopted Islam.55 If they had been the ancestors of the Zaghè, the earlier Muslim kings of Gao would not have been so easily turned into despicable pagans. Therefore it is more appropriate to suggest that the testimonies pertaining to the Zaghè and the Zâ refer in fact to a line of rulers who immigrated from somewhere else.56 Indeed, al-Maghili, who stayed in Gao at the end of the fifteenth century, writes that both Sonni ‘Ali and Askiyâ Muhammad pretended to descend from Muslim conquerors of the country, although they belonged to different dynasties.57 This conquest apparently occurred during the Almoravid period and led to the Islamization of the Gao kingdom.58 Earlier, during the period of the Qanda, the impact of Islam on the local people must have been very limited since al-Bakri remarks that the subjects of the Muslim king of Gao continued to worship idols.59 Therefore, it was not

53 Levrzon/Hopkins, Corpus, 174, 87.
54 Sauvage was convinced that the Zaghè were neophytes ("Épitaphes royales", 428, 434). Similarly Tringham (History, 90 n. 1) and Cuoq (Histoire, 134-136).
55 Al-Sâdî, T. al-Sûdân, 3tr. 5; Ibn al-Mukhrîs, T. al-Fattîsh (NH), 332.
56 Likewise Cuoq supposes that the Zaghè had after their arrival – from Kukiyâ – precipitated a revolution in Gao (Histoire, 134-136).
57 Al-Maghilt in: Hunwick, Sharti'a, 13, 171 tr. 69, 72.
58 Chronological considerations have to be based on the number of 30 rulers said to have reigned between this conquest and Sonni Ali (Sharti'a, 13tr. 69). This number corresponds precisely, as Hunwick observed, to the number of Zâ and Sonni kings between the first Muslim king of the Zâ, Kusay, and Sonni ‘Ali (Sharti'a, 69 n. 1).
59 Levrzon/Hopkins, Corpus, 87.
only out of conceit that the descendants of the enigmatic conquerors claimed that their Muslim ancestors had imposed their authority over a pagan society.

Did the Muslim conquerors of the Almoravid period come from Kukiya? According to the *T. al-Sudan*, the Zā originated in a place called Kukiya. It is here that the only Timbuktu chronicle available to Barth and Delafosse situates the foundation of the Zā dynasty: the foreign hero al-Ayaman is said to have been recognised as king after he had killed the demon-like fish whom the local population worshipped. Since the chronicle does not mention any transfer of the dynasty from Kukiya to Gao, some early scholars thought that the name served as an alternative designation for the town usually called Kâgho/Gao. Contrary to the localization of the Zā legend at Kukiya, the second Timbuktu chronicle, *T. al-Fattâsh*, clearly connects the foundation account of the Zā kingdom with the town of Gao. According to this more profane version, the Yemenite hero spoke a language different from that of the local people and was much taller. He is said to have become the ruler of the country because of his ability to protect the sedentary people against the nomads. Independent of the question of Zā origins, various references in *T. al-Sudan* and *T. al-Fattâsh* to Kukiya indicate that a locality of this name was situated about 150 km downstream of Gao close to the modern village of Bentia. Lying closer to the Songhay mainlands, one might think that the town would have been more of a stronghold of traditional beliefs than Gao. However, a number of funerary Arabic inscriptions show that Kukiya-Bentia was inhabited by a Muslim community perhaps from the beginning and certainly from the second half of the thirteenth century onwards. Kukiya therefore did not remain a centre of traditional "Songhay" in spite of Islamizing tendencies spreading from Gao. It is quite unwarranted to see it as the cradle of the Zā dynasty.  

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69 Desplagnes, *Plateau*, 73-76. Considering that Kukiya derives from *gungu* "island", Delafosse suggests that the name could be applied to various localities (*Haut-Sénégol*, I, 192 n. 1).
71 De Moraes Farias, *Inscriptions*, n° 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 196, 198, 199, 200. An inscription from Egef-n-Tawqqat, a site 7 km northwest of Kukiya-Bentia, is dated either 1182 or 1201 AD. See also de Gironcourt, *Missions*, 32-36, and Viré, "Stèles funéraires", 490-499. De Moraes Farias explicitly rejects the notion of "cultural authenticity" as applied to Kukiya (*Inscriptions*, 451).

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From Gao to the Zūmaler...
Where did the Za come from? Since the evidence from the Târikhs is only concerned with founding events of Kukiya or Gao, we should turn our attention to present-day traditions of origin. Since the most obvious descendants of the Za are the Zarma, we have to take into account their historical recollections. It is well-known that the Zarma trace their origins back to the foundation heroes Zabarkan and Mali Bero (the great Mali). The latter came from the country of Melle, or more precisely from the locality of Dirma/Tendirma in the west, where he and a number of companions are said to have mounted a base of a granary by which the group miraculously flew to Sarkan in Zarmaganda. In some versions of the legend, the group made a stop-over in Gao. In accordance with the Melle tradition of origin, which seems to refer rather to the Islamized kingdom of Ghana than to Mali properly speaking, the traditionists insist that the Zarma are Mallance, “people of Melle/Mali”. Furthermore, there are a number of cultural traits, including the language of the bards and the dragon-killing motif, which attest strong connections with the Soninke. Although the legendary tradition of a flying base of a granary seems curious, it would appear to refer to the shift of a number of people from the Lakes region of the Niger, i.e. ancient Ghana, to Gao in the Almoravid period. Moreover, the stay of Mali Bero in Gao seems to correspond to the subsequent rule of the Za/Zâghè, the ancestors of the Zarma. The later flight of the group to Sarkan and their dispersal in Zarmaganda and other (later) Zarma countries most likely refers to the progressive takeover of the territorial administration of the Gao kingdom by the Za/Zâghè and their officials from the previous Qanda ruling group.

Which language did the early Zarma speak? At present the Zarma inhabit a region which extends from the Saharan fringes in the north to the dry valley of

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68 Urvo, Histoire, 58-59; Gado, Zarzamarey, 140-143; Olivier de Sarden, Concepts, 406; Mounkaila, Mythe, 183.
70 Ardant du Picq, Population africaine, 17-18; Urvo, Histoire, 60.
71 Gado, Zarzamarey, 122, 146, 154; Mounkaila, Mythe, 232, 234; Lange, “Altes Mali”, 610-621.
72 Gado, Zarzamarey, 129, 145; Olivier de Sarden, Concepts, 406; Mounkaila, Mythe, 180.
74 Similarly Mounkaila, Mythe, 187-188. In this context the designation ancient Ghana, perhaps chronologically less misleading, refers to the same region as old Mali (Lange, “From Mande”, 285-288).
Ancient Kingdoms: States of the Middle Niger

Dallol Mawri in the east and to the Niger in the south. Although certain bards still retell the accounts of origin in Soninke, their spoken language is a dialect of Songhay. In view of the linguistic situation characterized by the spread of Northern Songhay to the oasis of Tabelbala 1400 km north of Timbuktu and to Agadez 860 km east of Gao, and of Southern Songhay to Hombori in the south, it seems that Songhay must have been spoken in the Niger valley and in the Zarma country, in Zarmaganda and Zarmatarey, since ancient times. It may be noted in passing that the Northern Songhay speakers are composed of three sedentary groups, the inhabitants of Takedda/In Gall, of Agadez and of Tabelbala, and of two nomadic Berber groups, the Idaaskahak and the Igdalen; a third nomadic group, the Iberogan, are black African cultivators of the Igdala. Because of the considerable linguistic differences between the two Songhay languages, the separation between Northern and Southern Songhay might be traced back to a period before the arrival of the Zâ/Zâghê to the area east of Gao. Since today only a minority of Songhay-speakers consider themselves to a certain extent to be Songhay, it is only modern convention that applies this name to the two languages. In order to avoid any confusion with the later ethnogenesis of the Songhay on the Middle Niger, it is more appropriate to use the artificial terms Proto-Songhay and respectively Proto-Songhay speakers. Because of their numerical weakness the Soninke-speaking Zâ/Zâghê and their followers doubtlessly began to adopt the language of the local Proto-Songhay population shortly after their arrival at Gao towards the end of the eleventh century. A rapid takeover of the local language by the foreign ruling group is indicated by a number of inscriptions from Gao-Saney providing "Songhay" terms, the earliest dating from 1203 AD. Though probably preceded by other officials, the Qanda dyvis the eastern Niger, the Kane establish successive situational changes in the country. The Zâ, the opposition be

2. The Almoravid... 

The deep involvement of the Songhay suggests an extensive pre-Islamic impact of Islam leading to rise of an Islamic state. The Sissi establish successive situational changes in Ghana and the Almoravid period. In the north of Ghana were not situated as is generally believed for 400 km. While the were corresponding the capital of the Kumbi Saleh, the text that the kings of Ghana went to the river Niger. Further to the fourth to the twelfth century it is in Tendiriga, this is the point of departure for the basis of the written, as

n° 25a. The correspondence of 545-547. Similarly the conquest of Hausaland and 476-477). 

 wasted. "Chute", 16; 

109-110; Lange, "Almoravides"). 

in the region between the Maigre Mountains which seem to make located on "Ort au pied de buttes", 249-250. 

Urvo, Histoire, 58; 

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though certain bards language is a dialect of the spread of North- baku and to Agadez the north, it Tabellala, and of the Zarma tribes. It may be noted of three sedentary forms: Tafi, and Sen; a third nomadic form: Because of the continuities, the separation back to a period before Bani, it is only a minority of the Soninke adopt the language of Senegal at Gao towards the language by the foreign Ga-Sany and Ga-Sany providing the Sardin, Conception, 225; the south was most likely (ibid., 213-221). It is to explain the Mande adoption of a Zaghé elite, while Mande”, 299). have been sedentary people (ibid., 75). The Songhay (ibid., 75). The linguistic relationship of Mande, and Proto-Mande and

by other officials of the Sisse regime, members of the new dynasty and their followers began from the end of the eleventh century onward to supplant the agents of the Qanda dynasty in the provincial districts. Despite their dispersal beyond the eastern Niger bend and the loss of their original language, these members of the Sisse establishment retained their Ghanefan tradition of origin. A number of successive situations progressively led to the ethnogenesis of the Zarma: the integration of the Zâ into the local population, the alignment of the Zâ with Mali and the opposition between the Zâ and the emerging Sonni dynasty.

2. The Almoravids and Dynastic Changes in Ghana and Gao

The deep involvement of the rulers of Gao-Sany with the spread of Islam suggests an extensive previous exposure to the new religion. In Ghana the long lasting impact of Islam led to the overthrow of divine kingship and to the subsequent rise of an Islamic state. Because of geographical proximity, these revolutionary changes in Ghana were highly relevant for the history of the Gao kingdom in the Almoravid period. Indeed, there are good reasons to suppose that the heartlands of Ghana were not situated in Kumbi Saleh at a distance of 850 km from Gao, as is generally believed, but in the Lakes region of the Niger at a distance of only 400 km. While the written evidence of the tenth and the eleventh centuries concerning the capital of Ghana supports its localization in the semi-desert region of Kumbi Saleh, the textual data of the twelfth century would appear to show that the kings of Ghana were established in the much more fertile Lakes region of the river Niger. Furthermore, the archaeological sites in this region, dating from the fourth to the twelfth century, include a number of royal burial mounds. Finally, it is in Tendirma, the centre of the Lakes region, that Zarma tradition locates the point of departure of the legendary flight of Mali Bero to the east. On the basis of the written, archaeological and oral evidence, it must be concluded that,