3. The Domination of Mali and the Emergence of the Songhay

Three related aspects of historical developments on the Middle Niger between the thirteenth and the fifteenth Century are distinguishable: the political, the dynastic and the ethnic. Beginning with the political, this period saw the expansion of Mali from the upper Niger to the eastern Niger bend. Up to now, the rise of Mali and the inclusion of the Gao kingdom into this empire have mostly been described with the presumption of an ethnically homogeneous and stable situa-
and the Qanda is also located in Gao-Saney. Situated near the twin town Gao-Saney the Qanda appear to be in a more advantageous position than the Qanda of Gao Ancien, who were the subservient kings. The Qanda had a royal court residing in the town of Gao Ancien than in the more remote homes of the inhabitants of Gao-Saney. Although the Qanda were subject to the Soninke refugees from Gao Ancien, the Qanda’s rule of fired bricks to the east of the town has been the tomb or the burial mound of the Zaghe dynasty. The eastern part of the town of Gao has been the site of many Soninke graves and, it is not uncommon for the refugees to settle in the area and to construct on the earlier tombs and burial mounds. The graves have produced many artifacts and grave goods which support the survival of the ancient culture into the medieval and later period.

From Ghana and Mali to Songhay

The rise of Songhay in the Middle Niger between the 14th and 16th centuries was due to the political, the dynastic, and the commercial period saw the expansion of the Songhay Empire. Up to now, the rise of Songhay as a great empire have mostly been attributed to the emergence of a decentralized and stable situation.
tion on the Middle Niger: under the newly established leadership of Sundjata and his Keita successors, the Malinke of Mali grew stronger than the neighbouring peoples and were thus able to subdue vast regions of the Sahelian belt including the Middle Niger and in particular Gao and the Songhay people.\textsuperscript{114}

It has been overlooked that the rise of Mali did not involve the conquest of foreign peoples but a process of integrating Mande or Mande-dominated neighbours into a common Islamic dominion on the basis of Ghanaian heritage. According to the traditions of the Malinke, Sundjata, the founder of the Mali empire, obtained legitimacy to rule by going into exile in Mema, a country close to the Lakes region. There, in the remnant of Ghana, he is said to have distinguished himself as a warrior to such an extent that the Sisse king appointed him the leading military commander. Meanwhile, the Malinke were subject to the oppressive Soso king Sunanguru. Some time later, Sundjata followed a call back to his country, confronted the foreign tyrant, and defeated him in the Battle of Kirina.\textsuperscript{115} These episodes, generally dated to the first half of the thirteenth century, should not necessarily all be seen in terms of actual events. For example the Mema exile, probably patterned on mythological ideas, may just be indicative of a powerful Ghanaian tradition of statehood adopted by the Malinke from the Soninke and onto which they subsequently left their own imprints.\textsuperscript{116}

In the Gao kingdom the Keita did not face a distinct population with its own dynasty but a closely related ruling elite of Ghanaian origin. During the twelfth and the thirteenth century the Za/Zaghê kingdom was a successor state of Ghana in the same sense as the kingdom of the Soninke, since the ruling Zarma had originated from Ghana together with the Sisse/Zaghê refugee king Kema-Magha/Yamâ b. Kimâ. By referring to Melle or Mal as their country of origin, the Zarma simply replaced a name associated with divine kingship by a name more compatible with Islam. In fact, their home country of Dirma or Tendirma in the Lakes region of the Niger was precisely situated in the central province of ancient and medieval Ghana. A similar case can be made for the Mali empire of the Keita, since their historical antecedents link them to the Islamic Malal of the pre-Almoravid period, situated somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Lakes region.\textsuperscript{117} Here again Malal seems to be the Muslim pen name of Ghana – perhaps known in the Central Sahel – or power, carried for the period when the Muslim Zarma were present.

We do not know precisely how the eastern and the western Malian kings are hardly parallel. Therefore Barmandâna, the first century, must already have had pilgrimage without having sold routes.\textsuperscript{118} Among the sons of Mecca: Mansa Wali in Sâkura towards 1300 and Mansa Mûsâ travelled the Taghaza and Tuit, or his

In the post-Almoravid kingdom for more than the second half of the thirteenth century, the supposed,\textsuperscript{120} the Al-Sâdi of Mali, and dates the importance of Mûsâ (1312-1337).\textsuperscript{121} It occurred during the


\textsuperscript{115} Niane, Sundjata, 62-72, 90-126; Johnson, Sen-Jans, 39, 155-167, 191; Levzioin, Ancient Ghana, 58; Lange, "Altes Mali", 599-605.

\textsuperscript{116} Levzioin, Ancient Ghana, 50, 58-60, 80, Fage, History, 71, 75-76.

\textsuperscript{117} Al-Bakâ in: Levzioin/Hopkins, Corpus, 82-83. See also Monctil, "Empires du Mali", 323-329, and Levzioin, Ancient Ghana, 53-55.


\textsuperscript{119} Niane, Sundjata, 62-72, 90-126; Johnson, Sen-Jans, 39, 155-167, 191; Levzioin, Ancient Ghana, 58; Lange, "Altes Mali", 599-605.

\textsuperscript{120} Levzioin, Ancient Ghana, 50, 58-60, 80, Fage, History, 71, 75-76.

\textsuperscript{121} Al-Bakâ in: Levzioin/Hopkins, Corpus, 82-83. See also Monctil, "Empires du Mali", 323-329, and Levzioin, Ancient Ghana, 53-55.


\textsuperscript{122} Both al-Sâdi and Ibn Sûdên, 71, 13; T. al-Fattâsh, Gao (T. al-Fattâsh, 335).

\textsuperscript{123} According to al-Idrîs in: Levzioin/Hopkins, Corpus, 82-83. See also Monctil, "Empires du Mali", 323-329, and Levzioin, Ancient Ghana, 53-55.

\textsuperscript{124} Houdas translates "Songhai" (T. al-Sûdên, 71).
The leadership of Sundjata and his brother Boubou, much less the neighboring Hausa and Songhai peoples, were not isolated from the wider Mandinka belt including the Soninke and Wolof people. The Sundjata legend also involves the conquest and conversion of the Fatimids, and their association with the Malinke were subject to the order of the new rulers who were successors to Sundjata. In the case of the Malinke, they were more closely aligned with the Fatimids than the Songhai and Hausa. However, the Malinke were also more isolated from the Fatimids than the Songhai and Hausa, and their interactions with them were more sporadic.

The influence of the Fatimids on the Malinke was limited to a few trade centers, such as Gao and Timbuktu. The Malinke were more interested in their own internal conflicts and power struggles, and were less affected by the Fatimids than the Songhai and Hausa. The Fatimids had a limited presence in the Malinke region, and their influence was more limited than in the Songhai and Hausa regions.

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T. al-Fattāsh records the passing of Mansa Mūsā through Gao without any hint of a prior conquest. However, trying to present a coherent picture of the historical developments of the Western Sudan from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, Ibn Khaldūn associates the expansion of Mali with military exploits. He claims that either Mansa Sākūr or Saghmanja, a general of Mansa Mūsā, conquered Gao. Disregarding this statement as being based on a preconception, it appears to be more appropriate to consider the extension of Mali’s influence on Gao in terms of a process of self-engendered aggrandisement. On the basis of common heritage with Ghana, the bonds of Mande ethnicity, and unifying Islamic solidarity, the ruling class of Gao under the leadership of the Za appears to have consented to enter into an alliance with Mali as a junior partner.

The concrete implications of Mali’s rule in Gao are difficult to determine. Al-‘Umari counts Gao and other countries among the provinces of Mali, but he provides no details on the administration of the empire. Ibn Battūta stayed in Gao for one month in 1353, but he fails to refer to the political leadership of the town. Having earlier mentioned the governor of Mali in Timbuktu and a farba (Malian governor) in a village on the way to Gao, his silence seems to indicate that Gao lay within the sphere of influence of Mali. More clearly, the evidence provided by Ibn Khaldūn on the integration of Takezza into the Mali empire implies that Gao was firmly in the hands of the Keita. These external sources suggest that Gao was a peaceful province of imperial Mali during the fourteenth century.

The geographical extension of Mali’s influence beyond Gao can likewise be determined on the basis of information provided by Arabic writers. According to al-‘Umari, the empire of Mali extended from Tūra on the Atlantic ocean in the west to the longitude of Mūlī in the east or, following another text, to Bornū. Ibn Battūta mentions a locality called Muli downstream of Gao but he describes it as a village of the Limiyūn forming the last district of Mali. Beyond it there lay the powerful kingdom of Nupe which no white man could enter. Mūlī, situated somewhere between Gao on one side and Bornū and Nupe on the other.

120 Ibn al-Mukhtār, T. al-Fattāsh, (NH), 335. The reluctance of internal sources to admit foreign conquest is, in view of the later rise of the Songhay, in this case irrelevant.
121 Levzioni/Hopkins, Corpus, 334.
123 For earlier attempts to delimit the borders of Mali, see Delafosse, Haut-Senégol, II, 191, 221; Mauny, Tableau, 511-514; Levzioni, Ancient Ghana, 75-80.
124 Al-‘Umari, Maṣālik and Ta‘rīf, in: Levzioni/Hopkins, Corpus, 262, 276. Tūra could correspond to Futa Toro situated south of the Senegal and close to the Atlantic ocean.
125 The translation of Levzioni and Hopkins is here misleading because according to the text baldat Mūlī, situated in the land of the Limiyūn, was the last district of Mali (Corpus, 287).
From Ghana and Mali to Songhay: The Mande Factor in Gao History

...without any hint of the picture of the historical pottery of the fourteenth century, but his memory exploits. He claims to have conquered Hansa Mūsā, conquered the city, and unifying Islamic religion. On the basis of communication and unifying Islamic religion, the Za appears to have been of a partner.

It is difficult to determine. Al-Muqaddasi writes of Mali, but he provides no real evidence. The narrative of the town. The town of Gao and the farba (Malian mercenary) is to indicate that Gao and other towns. The evidence provided by the Za empire implies that the Za and Sanusīs are major cities. The evidence of the Za and Sanusīs is that the Za and Sanusīs have a semblance of the fourteenth century.

The version of Gao can likewise be ascribed to local writers. According to the text, Gao was on the Atlantic ocean however another text indicates that Gao was inland. Another text states that Gao was inland but he also states that it was on the Atlantic ocean. Beyond the text and the oral traditions of Gao the case is irrelevant.

(Munshi, Corpus, 261, 300-301, 303, 305, 307; Hassans, Haut-Sénégal, II, 191, 215, 239, 246, 274, 276, 226, 276, 276, 276.)

Tūrā could correspond to the western part of Mali (Corpus, 287).
other, seems to be equivalent to the Dallol Mawri stretching from the north to the south and therefore constituting a longitudinal delimitation. At present, this dry valley corresponds to the eastern limit of Zarma territory and could therefore be considered the easternmost extension of Mali’s authority. Furthermore, Muli seems to refer to the related ethnic name Mawri which designates Zarma-speaking groups belonging to the Mande tradition and Hausa-speaking groups of the Bornu tradition inhabiting the northern reaches of the Dallol Mawri.  

In the south, the Tienga living on both sides of the Niger at the confluence of the Dallol Mawri and beyond could correspond to Ibn Battuta’s Lumiyyun.  

In the north, the hegemony of Mali extended to Walata, and in the northwest to the trading town of Takedda, where it included the Tuareg tribes of Kel Intasar and Kel Gress or Kel Gharus. It is disputed whether Takedda, located near Air, was controlled by Mali or not. Al-Umari mentions that the copper-producing town of Zkri, Dkri or Nkwi, probably Takedda, belonged to Mali during the reign of Mansa Musa. Having visited Takedda himself, Ibn Battuta reports that the town was under the rule of a Berber sultan and that its copper was exported to Gobir and Bornu. During his stay in Biskra, Ibn Khaldun head of Takedda, in the south of Wargla. Founded by the Sanhaja, the town was, according to him, subject to Mali. From there, a huge caravan and many black African pilgrims annually went to Cairo, whence the pilgrims continued to Mecca. Despite his dependence on Mali, the Berber sultan of the town entertained diplomatic relations with Mzab and with Wargla. On the basis of a supposed confusion of copper for salt and in view of the localization of the town “south of Wargla, slightly to the west”, it has been argued that Ibn Khaldun mistakenly wrote Takedda instead of Tademekka. However, such a mistake is unlikely for a number of reasons. First, a rich copper mine has been discovered close to Takedda/Azilik and therefore Takedda did undoubtedly export copper. Second, al-Umari’s reference to the copper-producing Zkri, Dkri or Nkwi in Khaled’s information. The date of the last known date of copper mining is 1864. It is more likely to have existed than between Tademekka and Zkri, Dkri or Nkwi. From Tademekka led direct Fourth, on account of being the meeting place for large caravans, situated nearly due south of “slightly to the west of some of the Hoggar mountains to the west of Air including Tademekka, the black African-speaking people of Tadesaw, a clan found in the region of In Gor and expansion of the Mali empire in the 15th century, black Africans speaking Tuareg refers, in the middle of the 15th century, as an independent ruler and point out that this ruling class of the Tuareg of the 16th century. The textual sources also indicate the ethnic foundation of this princely class.”

H. Lhote and N. Levtzion, "Al-Umari’s reference to the copper-producing Zkri, Dkri or Nkwi in Khaled’s information. The date of the last known date of copper mining is 1864. It is more likely to have existed than between Tademekka and Zkri, Dkri or Nkwi. From Tademekka led direct Fourth, on account of being the meeting place for large caravans, situated nearly due south of “slightly to the west of some of the Hoggar mountains to the west of Air including Tademekka, the black African-speaking people of Tadesaw, a clan found in the region of In Gor and expansion of the Mali empire in the 15th century, black Africans speaking Tuareg refers, in the middle of the 15th century, as an independent ruler and point out that this ruling class of the Tuareg of the 16th century. The textual sources also indicate the ethnic foundation of this princely class.”

522
the copper-producing Zkrit/Takedda subject to Mali, confirms the validity of Ibn Khaldūn’s information. Third, for geographical reasons close diplomatic relations are more likely to have existed between Takedda and Biskra, Mzab, and Wargla, than between Tadmekka and these three northern towns, since the trade route from Tadmekka led directly to Tuat, Siijmla, and Tahir further to the west. Fourth, on account of better travelling conditions Takedda was a more suitable meeting place for large caravans heading to the east than Tadmekka. Fifth, being situated nearly due south of Wargla, Takedda could easily be mistaken as lying “slightly to the west of south” on account of the north-south desert routes skirting the Hoggar mountains to the west. Sixth, the Berbers Tin Gharās mentioned by al-Umari as being subject to Mali could be either the Kel Gress or the Kel Gharus, both groups of the eastern Tuareg. At that time the Kel Gress inhabited the region west of Air including Takedda/Azelik, where the Kel Gharus live at present. Seventh, the black African sedentary population of Takedda/Azelik consisted of speakers of Tasawaq, a dialect of Northern Songhay, who nowadays are mainly found in the region of In Gall, 80 km south of the ancient town. Therefore, the expansion of the Mali empire far to the east did not only involve Berbers but also black Africans speaking a language of Proto-Songhay. Finally, since al-Umari refers, in the middle of the fourteenth century, to the Berber sultan of Tadmekka as an independent ruler, we can discard the idea that Ibn Khaldūn intended to point out that this ruler was dependent on Mali by the end of the fourteenth century. The textual and geographical evidence therefore suggests that, in fact, medieval Mali controlled Takedda at the foot of the Air mountains, 730 km east of Gao. In this region, Malian domination may have been preceded by the large territorial expansion of the Gao kingdom in the tenth century. It was certainly succeeded by the Songhay conquest of western Air at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In each case the Proto-Songhay-speakers must have provided the ethnic foundation of the territorial expansion towards the east.

139 H. Lhote and N. Levzcion situate Takedda southeast of Wargla (“Contribution à l’étude des Touraques”, 361; Ancient Ghana, 77). In fact, Takedda/Azelik (6° 42' E) lies less than 2° east of the longitudes of Wargla (4° 54' E).

140 Al-Umari in Levzcion/Hopkins, Corpus, 262. Cuq reads Shagarar Tars (Recueil, 265).

141 Cuq reads Shagarar Tars (Recueil, 265). For the history and localization of the Kel Gress and the Kel Gharus, see Bernus, Touraques nigeriens, 57-60; 319-320.

142 Bernus/Bernus, Du sel, 12-29; Norris, Tuaregs, 35-40; Nikolai, Dialectes, 14-25, 262; Hamani, Sultanat touareg, 95-109.

143 Levzcion/Hopkins, Corpus, 274.

144 Al-Ya‘qubi in Levzcion/Hopkins, Corpus, 21.

The cessation of Mali's authority over Gao can be dated to the beginning of the fifteenth century, some time before Timbuktu's independence in 1433. It was, in one way or another, connected to the emergence of the Songhai, which both chroniclers associate with the flight of 'Ali Kolon from Mali towards the end of the thirteenth century. Al-Sa'di describes the escape of the dynastic founder from the court of Mali as an heroic act of liberation which "severed his people's ties of subordination to the sultan of Mali". The author of the T. al-Fattâsh does not present 'Ali Kolon as a national hero but as somebody who was born in Mali and served the ruler, but broke with him for reasons too complex to explain. Accordingly, historians are divided. While some depict the hero as a hostage who was kept by force at the court of Mali, others consider him a Malian adventurer or a governor who rebelled. Besides the tradition of origin, the latter base their argument on the Sonni and Shy title of the new kings, which means "representative" or "confidant of the ruler" indicating a position of dependency on a supreme ruler. These elements convey the impression that 'Ali Kolon might have been one of the numerous officials at the court of Mali recruited from among the subordinate dynasties all over the empire. Notwithstanding the prospects of advancement and lustre at the imperial court, he would appear to have decided to no longer exert himself in the interests of Mali, but to return to his country instead in order to organize a rebellion. It needed the efforts of a long line of Sonni petty rulers before this plan came to fruition. However, this image conveyed

145 Al-Sa'di, T. al-Sudān, 9, 22/tt. 17, 37-38. Levzioni thinks that Malian hegemony over Gao ceased by the end of the fourteenth century (Ancient Ghana, 84), while Hunwick believes that it continued well into the fifteenth century (Timbuktu, XXXVII).
146 Al-Sa'di, T. al-Sudān, 6/rr. 11-12; Hunwick, Timbuktu, 8. De Morais Farias casts doubt on the historicity of 'Ali Kolon by pointing out the similarity of this figure with the culture hero Aliguran of Tuareg legends (Inscriptions, §§ 165-184, 228-239).
147 Ibn al-Mulhikhar, T. al-Fattâsh (NH), 334. Following Monteil ("Empires du Mali", 165-166), most historians suppose that Songhay was a rebellious province which was conquered and liberated more than once (Rouch, Contribution, 180; Timingham, History, 91-92; Levzioni, Ancient Ghana, 75-76).
148 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal, 11, 73; Levzioni, Ancient Ghana, 75; Cuqo, Histoire, 74, 141, 143.
149 Timingham, History, 66; Cuqo, Histoire, 142; Hunwick, Timbuktu, XXXVII.
150 On the authority of Majmūd Ka‘tî, Ibn al-Mukhtâr writes that Shy (= Sonni) means koy benendi "representative or substitue of the sultan" (T. al-Fattâsh, 43/rr. 82). According to Delafosse shôyi (Sonni) has in Maliike the similar meaning of "subordinate or confidant of the ruler" (cf. Hunwick, Timbuktu, 333-334).
151 'Ali Kolon would then have been a hero comparable to Ya'qub Nabame, the leader of the Kebbi movement of independence from Sokoto in the nineteenth century (cf. Last, Sokoto Caliphate, 84-85).

by the Songhay tradition, 'Ali Kolon figure as a Songhay with the Tuareg. 152 Still, the Zaghè were deeply affected in the light of this man's adventure. In an attempt to explain the political and ethnic situation of the period, historians not find any indication of the Middle Nigers, Bazakànyin, in the Sonni myths of the dynastic level nor in the Proto-Songhay literature with the flight of the Sonni in the eleventh century. Various independent groups of Mandé immigrants more than thirty kings of Sonni rule under the Muslim kings of Gao. The same geneaology of Askia Muhammad, 153 to which he links the ancestors who were both of Sonni and Songhay origins.

152 For these comparisons, see the "Moses moing the Sonni going back into the Sharih’s, 13/rr. 69).
153 Al-Bakri, al-Zuhiri, thinks that the members of Bagháma (History, 89)
154 In view of the wide-ranging literature on Shari’i and Songhay in general (Bagháma, 155 Lange, "Chute", 16).
156 Literally Wangara
by the Songhay traditions is partly contradicted by the legendary nature of the ‘Ali Kolon figure established in reference to the parallel Aliqurran narratives of the Tuareg. Still, there are strong reasons to believe that the descendants of the Zaghâ were deeply affected by the extension of Malian rule over the Niger bend. In the light of this major event of Gao history, the ‘Ali Kolon episode reads like an attempt to explain the split-off of the Sonni from the Zâ.

In fact, the political position of the Sonni needs to be seen in the context of the ethnic situation of the eastern Niger bend. Up to the fourteenth century, we do not find any indication that there was a Songhay population living in the region of the Middle Niger. In the eleventh century, the inhabitants of Gao are called Bazarkâniyyin, in the twelfth Barbâra, and in the fourteenth Yârân. Also, on the dynastic level none of the ruling houses of Gao can be identified as Songhay. The first dynasty, the Qanda, may have been Proto-Songhay, but their real ethnic identity remains unknown. The Mande influence on the eastern Niger bend seems to have resulted from the expansion of the Ghana empire to the east in the eleventh century. Later traditions associate the spread of a Soninke elite among the Proto-Songhay – which led to the ethnogenesis of the Zarma – specifically with the flight of the Sissi/Zâ from Ghana to Gao towards the end of the eleventh century. Various indications show that the Sonni themselves belonged to this group of Mande immigrants. According to al-Maghili, the ancestors of Sonni ‘Ali more than thirty kings before him – a number apparently including at the beginning the Muslim kings of the Zâ – rose up against the pre-Almoravid rulers of Gao. The same genealogical claims probably also involving the Zâ were made by Askia Muhammad. The author of the T. el-Fattâsh goes one step further when he links the ancestors of Sonni ‘Ali and those of Askia Muḥammad and adds that they were both of Wangara and Soninke origin. Present-day traditions about the descendants of the Sonni, the Sohance, confirm a Wangara and hence

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Caoq, Histoire, 74, 141,
BUKTA, XXXVII.
that Shy (= Sonni) means
43/tr. 82). According to
the confidant of the
Nabâma, the leader of
the fourteenth century (cf. Last, Sokoto

152 For these comparisons see de Moraes Farias, Inscriptioni, §§ 165-184. However, the reference
to the “Moses motif” as an indication of a foreign conquest neglects the local origin of the Sonni going back to the Almoravid period (idem, §§ 190, 448; al-Maghili in: Hunwick, Sharti‘a, 13/tr. 69).

153 Al-Bakri, al-Zuhri, al-Umari in: Levzion/Hopkins, Corpus, 87, 99, 261. Timimingham thinks that the members of the ruling class of Gao in the twelfth century were either Zaghâwa or Baghâna (History, 89).

154 In view of the wide distribution of Songhay languages, it is very likely that they spoke
Proto-Songhay and not a Mande or a Voltaic language.


156 Cf. Hunwick, Sharti‘a, 69 n. 3; Lange, “From Mande”, 294.

157 Al-Maghili in: Hunwick, Sharti‘a, 13, 17/tr. 69, 72.

158 Literally Wangara and Wâkuriyyûn, i.e. Soninke (Ibn al-Mukhtar, T. el-Fattâsh, 48/tr. 93-94).
a Soninke origin of the dynastic ancestors. Furthermore, the dynastic title of Sonni may have been derived from a royal Chanean title which, by the addition of the ethnic marker -nke, gave rise among the northern Mandes to the ethnonym Soninke. Therefore, the Sonni were very likely part of the Mandes, or more precisely Soninke, ruling class of medieval Gao.

Who were the Songhay and when did they arrive in their present location? Although the language later called Songhay was established on the eastern Niger bend in ancient times, the Songhay properly speaking did not emerge before the fourteenth century. None of the Arab authors before al-Maghili mentions them by this or a similar ethnic name. Only the appellation Zaghaay applied by Ibn Battuta and Ibn Khaldun to people living between the Middle Niger and Hausaland bears some resemblance to the name Songhay. Evidence for the former settlement of Songhay people in a region later integrated into the Hausa world, comes from a Hausa tradition from the beginning of the nineteenth century according to which the people of Kebbi descend from a Songhay father and a Katsina mother. Likewise, linguistic and mythological survivals bear testimony to the presence of culture traits in Kebbi later associated with the Songhay. However, these indications do not suffice to establish the emergence of a specific Songhay identity in Kebbi, and a fourteenth or fifteenth century migration of some of these people to the eastern Niger bend as I thought before.

According to a more plausible interpretation, the Zaghay of western Hausaland and beyond owed their appellation to their common cultural heritage with the Zaghay of Kanem-Borno. The eastern Zaghay were descendants of the Zaghawa, the first ruling group of the Chadic state. This implies that they must have spoken Kanuri, while the western Zaghay must have used Hausa and perhaps Songhay. Such a linguistic diversity undermines the argument that the common features of the western and eastern Zaghay can be conceived in terms of modern ethnicity. Presently, two peoples of western Hausaland are considered to be closely related to the inhabitants of Zamfara and of Kebbi. Barth specifically calls them Azna. Is the number of other societies in the seven Banza states. In view of this structure, surprisingly that Arab adds the appellation Azna to the appellation Zaghay.

Going one step further, Gao-Saney, the Zaghaay of the netherworld, are the netherworld sites for Ghana. From the legend of the primordial snake, they themselves in the course of history, and it protected the killing of the snake by the kings of Ghana continue to appear in the elements suggest that some of the traditions in which the primordial snake was killed some form of snake cult exists; it would therefore appear to have survived, like the Azna, in a section of society related to the chief.
calls them Azna. In terms of the Hausa legend they belong — together with a number of other societies southwest of Hausaland — to the Banza bakuwai “the seven Banza” states. It has been shown that the distinction between the Hausa bakuwai “the seven Hausa” and the Banza bakuwai was based in pre-Islamic times on the prevalence of either the clans of UPPERworld or the clans of netherworld deities. Among the Kanuri the same dichotomy applies to the Duguwa and Sefuwa, the former having been overthrown around 1068 AD by the latter. In view of this structural similarity between the Aznâ and the Duguwa, it is not surprising that Arab authors applied to them the same name Zaghây, related to the appellation Aznâ.

Going one step further we have to ask whether the Zâghi or Zaghây rulers of Gao-Saney, the Zâghè, likewise claimed descent from an ancestral deity related to the netherworld. As noted above, the Zâghè originated in all likelihood from Ghana. From the legend of Wagadu it appears that the people of Ghana believed in a primordial snake called Bida. The snake allowed the newcomers to establish themselves in the country, it taught them how to cultivate, it provided them with gold, and it protected the king. The legend further describes the fall of Ghana with the killing of the snake and the shift of the gold to Bure. Descendants of the kings of Ghana continue to practice a specific snake cult up to the present time. These elements suggest that the ancestral appellation Zâghè referred to a kingdom in which the primordial snake was highly venerated and in which the rulers practiced some form of snake cult. As the snake was the principal symbol of the netherworld, it would therefore appear that indeed the ancestors of the Zâghè of Gao-Saney belonged, like the Aznâ of Hausaland, and like the Duguwa of Kanem-Bornu, to the section of society related by their clan deities to the netherworld. In contradistinction to the Zâghè and the Zarma, the Songhay — and accordingly the Proto-Songhay — might have been different. In the centre of their

167 Barth, Travels, III, 154 (the whole of Kebbi), 634 (the Zamfara town Tymba).
168 See above pp. 229-234.
169 See above pp. 243-248. The name Agha applied by the Tuareg to the Kanuri (Alojaly, Lexique, 211) may therefore refer to the Zaghâwa/Duguwa and Zaghyâ periods of Kanem-Bornu history.
170 Perhaps the widespread occurrence of Yemen in Sudanic traditions of origin corresponds to an Islamizing transposition into legend of the Zaghâwa/Zaghè reference to the deities and clans of the netherworld (see chart 17 p. 503).
172 At first sight the hypothesis of an Aznâ identity of the Zâghè seems difficult to reconcile with the fall of the Duguwa in Kanem during the process of Islamization (see above pp. 243, 247-248). However, it is quite conceivable that the contrast between two clan-families was in Ghana and Gao less accentuated than in Kanem.
cult-mythological universe stood the thunder and weather-god Dongo. The
their ethnonyms seems to have been derived from Songo, another form of
the name of the weather-god, with the additional suffix -ey for "people of". There
are two ways of looking at Dongo/Songo, either as a weather-god and in this
sense representing the deities of the upperworld, or as the leading deity of foreign
invaders and in this sense being on the side of the netherworld. It is on this distinc-
tion that our perception of the role of the early Zaghê kings in Gao depends.
Were they foreigners who wanted to set themselves apart from the local elite by
referring to their own ancestor, or were they flexible newcomers who wanted to
integrate themselves as much as possible into the local setting? In view of the
Caliphal loan names of the Zaghê and their association with the Almoravids,
it is perhaps more likely that the new kings of Gao intended to highlight their
Islamic orientation and their high ancestry in contrast to the more modest claims
of the local rulers.

With respect to the geographical origin of the Songhay we note that some
authors suppose that these enigmatic people were first established in the Niger
region downstream of Dendi and east of the Dalol Mawri in Kebbi. Even the
chroniclers of Timbuktu, in spite of their intention to present the Gao kingdom
as a Songhay state, depict the Songhay in certain instances as not yet fully
established in Gao and on the eastern Niger bend. Nevertheless, the available
evidence does not support the idea of a late medieval westward migration. Also,
it is problematic to link Songhay expansion with a probably earlier migration of Sorko fishermen. To arrive at a better understanding of the slow
emergence of a new Songhay warrior elite we have to turn our attention once
more to the dynastic history of Gao.

174 In Songhay the suffix -ey indicates plural determination for nouns including professional
groups (Prost, *Language*, 48; Lange, "From Mande", 250).
175 The latter is the case for Danko among the Hausa (Besmer, *Horses*, 87-89, 170; FN 96,
14, 23, 28 [all Daura]; FN 97, 8, 26-27, 33, 61 [all Daura]; 29 [Katsina], 84 [Sulleja]). See
also above p. 249.
176 Alternatively various groups might have been brought together under the umbrella of a
common ancestry as suggested by de Moraes Farias (*Inscriptio Abbecons*, § 403).
177 Delafosse considers the region between Kebbi, the lower Dendi, and the Dalol Dosso as
the cradle of the Songhay (*Haut-Sénégal*, 1, 239-240). Rouch locates the region of origin of the
Sorko in Dendi and of the Songhay in Kukiya (*Sorkawa*, 9-13; *Contribution*, 165-172).
178 Al-Sa'di, *T. al-Sudan*, 292, 310, 311/14, 444, 468, 471. With respect to a meeting of Askia
Muhammad in Gao, Ibn al-Mukhtar distinguishes between "all the Songhay" and the "noble
and common people" of Gao (*T. al-Fattâsh*, 59). The distinction is still maintained during
the reign of Askia Isma'il (1537-1539) (*T. al-Fattâsh*, 145/146, 261. The translation here is misleading. In fact, the Songhay are in this instance differentiated from the inhabitants of Gao).
From Ghana and Mali to Songhay: The Mande Factor in Gao History

Map 12: The eastward expansion of Mali and the emergence of the Songhay warriors, 14th - 15th centuries

529
The actual rulers of Gao during the Mali period were apparently the Zä. Although al-Sa'di attaches the Sonni genealogically to the Zä by claiming that 'Ali Kolon was a son of Zä Yasi boy, the last but five of the Zä,\textsuperscript{179} the Sonni stood in opposition to them. Yet, as we have seen, this confrontation was not the result of the foreign origins of the Sonni, since the birth of 'Ali Kolon in Mali should be interpreted, on the basis of Sonni traditions, as a reference to a simultaneous opposition to Mali and to the Zä.\textsuperscript{180} Indeed, the main point of dissent between the Zä and the Sonni must have been the question of Malian suzerainty: while the Zä continued to rule in the ancient capital of Gao as vassals of the Keita, the Sonni founded their own independent court in Kukiya early during the Mali period.\textsuperscript{181} A close connection between Zä and Malian domination is suggested in particular by the Zarma tradition of Zarmale. The tribal patriarchs are again supposed to have left Melle or Mali, often situated south of Másina but sometimes also at Dërma/Tëndërma,\textsuperscript{182} on the flying base of a granary. They are either thought to have come by way of Hombori or Gao. During a further stopover in Wanzerbe, they are said to have met the Sohance who opposed them.\textsuperscript{183} Such a sequence, first the Sonni and then the Zarma, and the particular connections of the patriarchs with the Malinke, would seem to imply that the arrival of the Zarma founding heros was not only related to the expansion of Ghana but also to that of Mali. It further suggests that Malian suzerainty was at one stage reinforced by the presence of a Malinke governor and his people in Gao.

Firmly established in Kukiya, in all likelihood the Sonni led a tenacious struggle of resistance against Malian authority interspersed with periods of nominal rapprochement.\textsuperscript{184} Towards the end of the fifteenth century, al-Maghili refers to vigorous Songhay warriors by stating that the successive Sonni kings each had to fight and subdue Tera mention thep their frien and their internad defeat of Mali w pieces of informa of the eastern Ni the powerful Son Lacking a united of their Mandes from beyond the Dallol Mand likely composed of the the Zä. With the support run able to expel the Zä from aristocracy ruling over the adequacy. It is in the course of the oppositional cavalry forces of the Zarma overlords and to the withdrawal of Mali from overlordship was certainly between local and foreign forces the local partisans of Mali.

4. Songhay from Sonni

The founder of the Songhay dynasty was Sonni 'Ali the Coss. He is the first to aspire to the top of the elite. The numerous militiamen were made into the expanding empires into the ruling class and some even remarkable that some two

\textsuperscript{179} T. al-Südân, 5/1, 9-10.

\textsuperscript{180} According to the local tradition of Gao recorded by al-Maghili, the ancestors of Sonni 'Ali conquered Gao and imposed Islam (Hunwick, \textit{Shari'ah}, 13/tr, 69: lange, \textit{"From Mande"}, 293-294, 297).

\textsuperscript{181} Ibn al-Mukhtar, \textit{T. al-Fattash}, 45/tr, 85. Earlier I conceived the Zä and the Sonni as two distinct royal clans (from different origins) which existed for a long term by side ("Chute", 172; \textit{"From Mande"}, 297-299).


\textsuperscript{183} Rouch, \textit{Contribution}, 207-208. A Songhay tradition of Tera insists on the alignment of the Zarua and the Malinke, their common retreat to Mali and the later return of the Zarua (Sou malaria, \textit{Traditions des Songhay}, 23-25).

\textsuperscript{184} Hunwick considers the first Sonni king as a Zä prince who revolted against Malian rule and he compares the attitude of the Malians towards the Sonni of Kukiya with the attitude of the later Moroccan Arm towards the Ashiyas of Dendi (\textit{Timbuktu}, XXXVII-XXXVIII). De Moraes Farias believes that the Sonni were a Mandinka war band (\textit{Inscription}, §§ 449-450).

\textsuperscript{185} Al-Maghili in: Hunwick.

\textsuperscript{186} Soumalla, \textit{Traditions des Songhay}, 17.

\textsuperscript{187} According to Olivier d.
From Ghana and Mali to Songhay: The Mande Factor in Gao History

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4. Songhay from Sonni 'Ali to Askiya Muhammad

The founder of the Songhay empire and the last effective ruler of the Sonni dynasty was Sonni 'Ali the Great (1465–1492). During his reign, the new Songhay nobility rose to the highest offices of state without fully eclipsing the old Soninke elite. The numerous military expeditions and the incorporation of new provinces into the expanding empire, fostered the integration of Mande and Songhay elements into the ruling class of the new state. Just as the renown of Sonni 'Ali was so remarkable that some twenty years after his death he was still widely remembered

185 Al-Maghili in: Hunwick, Shari‘a, 14/tr. 70.
186 Soumaila, Traditions des Songhay, 20–25.
187 According to Olivier de Sardan, the traditions of the Zarma are those of the aristocracy
and not those of all the people (Concepts, 406).