Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa

history and anthropology, and others who cared to share their views on Songhay with me, brought the history of the region where I was living and teaching to the centre of my intellectual focus.

To Article XVI (1994a: "Rois de Gao-Sanè")

This study is based on the discovery that the early twelfth century rulers of Gao-Saney are identical with the first Muslim kings of the Ẓā dynasty known from the Timbuktu chronicles (1988b: 8). It correctly stipulates that the rulers of Gao-Saney were newcomers who imposed their authority on the earlier Qanda kings of Gao. It is also right to suppose that the rulers of Gao-Saney, in spite of their Caliphal loan names, were not the first Muslim kings of Gao. It is further well-founded that Kukiya was not the first capital of the Ẓā and that Gao was not a Songhay state from the beginning.

The major shortcomings of this article concern the identification of the Gao-Saney rulers as Berbers and the notion of a pre-dynastic Mande ethnicity on the eastern Niger bend. Further, I now disclaim the idea that the use of the “Caliphal metaphor” indicates the existence of a non-dynastic mode of succession, and that the prominent position of certain queens is the result of a concerted marriage policy aimed at the integration of a foreign dynasty into the local establishment (1991a: 262, 263; XX: 514). De Moraes Farias supports the first idea by hypothesising that the “Caliphal metaphor” expresses a pact between powerful groups in the area leading to a rotational system of succession. With respect to the second he cogently argues that the queens were part of a system in which “official queens” performed important constitutional roles. From the perspective of divine kingship these offices once had priestly functions in connection with the great magna mater goddess (1999b: 129-149). They were only abolished at a relatively late stage in the process of Islamization (1990: 145-147).

To Article XVII (1994a: “From Mande to Songhay”)

Answering to criticism voiced by Hunwick who supports an orthodox view of Songhay history, this essay tries to bring into better focus the connections between the dynastic and the ethnic history of the Middle Niger. It continues to argue against the common idea of tribal stability and insists on the importance of traditions of origin for the understanding of ethnogenesis (specifically of the Zarma). With respect to the Mande substratum of the Middle Niger, it draws attention to the geography of the Lakes region of the to define Songhay ethnohistory (1994b: 217-222).

The article is flawed in supposing pre-Ẓāghé N Songhay are seen as late history, the Ẓāghé are their descendants. A r of a Ẓā and a Ẓāghé royal line against an alliance, which leads to the question of whether they possibly have been able to: (a) retain leadership. There is little evidence for such multi-faceted and complex power structures in the region. The disconnection is mainly the appearance that they correspond to a homogenous ruling line. The Ẓāghé from Ghana have been perceived as refugees and have the umbrella of local Massámara to identify the ancestors of the Ẓāghé from Ghana. The idea of the Ẓāghé is now replaced by the Ẓāghé from Ghana and the Ẓāghé from Ghana.

Misconceptions concerning the local vassal dynasty are (1996a: 157, 164). Having to practice a matrilineal system in Songhay.

38 De Moraes Farias, Inscriptiones, §§ 403, 421.

39 De Moraes Farias, Inscriptions, §§ 403, 421.
attention to the geographical closeness of the first centre of ancient Ghana, in the Lakes region of the Niger, to Gao and the eastern Niger bend. It further tries to define Songhay ethnicity on the basis of the royal Dongo/Sango cult (see also 1994b: 217-222).

The article is flawed by several misconceptions. The Zá are still linked to a supposed pre-Zághè Mande substratum on the eastern Middle Niger, and the Songhay are seen as late eastern immigrants from Kebbi. On the level of dynastic history, the Zághè are still identified as Berbers and the Sonni are considered to be their descendants. A related misinterpretation concerns the long-lasting duality of a Zá and a Sonni royal clan. The Zá are supposed to have called in Mali protection against an alliance between the Sonni and the Soruko and the Songhay. This leads to the question of the circumstances under which the submitted Zá could possibly have been able to call in the Keita and thus throw off the Zághè/Sonni leadership. There is little support in the available documentary and oral data for such multi-faceted and momentous medieval history for the eastern Middle Niger. The disconnection between the Zághè and the Zá is in particular undermined by the appearance of the Zát/Zuwa title on the Gao-Saney inscriptions.39

To Article XVIII (1996a: “Chute des Sissa”)  

The study proposes a re-evaluation of Songhay history on the basis of a greater geographical proximity between ancient Ghana and the Gao state. For various reasons the Zághè are now seen to be Soninke and not Berber by origin. The article tries to show that the Zághè are identical with the Zá of the Tariikhs and that they correspond to Sisse refugee kings from Ghana. It considers the Zá to be a homogenous ruling house which first ruled in Ghana, then experienced a palace revolt with a Muslim branch coming to power, and finally were expelled from Ghana by non-Sisse Muslims. This reconstruction makes it possible to conceive the Zághè as refugee Zá from Ghana who established themselves under the umbrella of local Massufa on the site of Gao-Saney. It further makes it possible to identify the ancestors of the Zarma from Tendirima as Sisse having originated from Ghana. The idea of a timeless Mande substratum on the eastern Niger bend is now replaced by the conception of a dynastic link between the Sisse from Ghana and the Zághè from Gao by way of the Zá.

Misconceptions concern the matrimonial policy of the Zághè with respect to the local vassal dynasty of the Qanda and the eastern origin of the Songhay (1996a: 157, 164). Having been former suzerains of the Qanda, the Zá did not need to practice a matrimonial policy with respect to the local kings. The epi-

39 De Moraes Farias, Inscriptions, §§ 20, 29.