

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 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/Šango cult (see also 1994b: 217-222).

The article is flawed by several misconceptions. The Zā are still linked to a supposed pre-Zāghē 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 Zāghē are still identified as Berbers and the Sonni are considered to be their descendants. A related misinterpretation concerns the long-lasting duality of a Zā and a Sonni royal clan. The Zā are supposed to have called in Mali protection against an alliance between the Sonni and the Sorko and the Songhay. This leads to the question of the circumstances under which the submitted Zā could possibly have been able to call in the Keita and thus throw off the Zāghē/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 Zāghē and the Zā is in particular undermined by the appearance of the Zā/Zuwā title on the Gao-Saney inscriptions.<sup>39</sup>