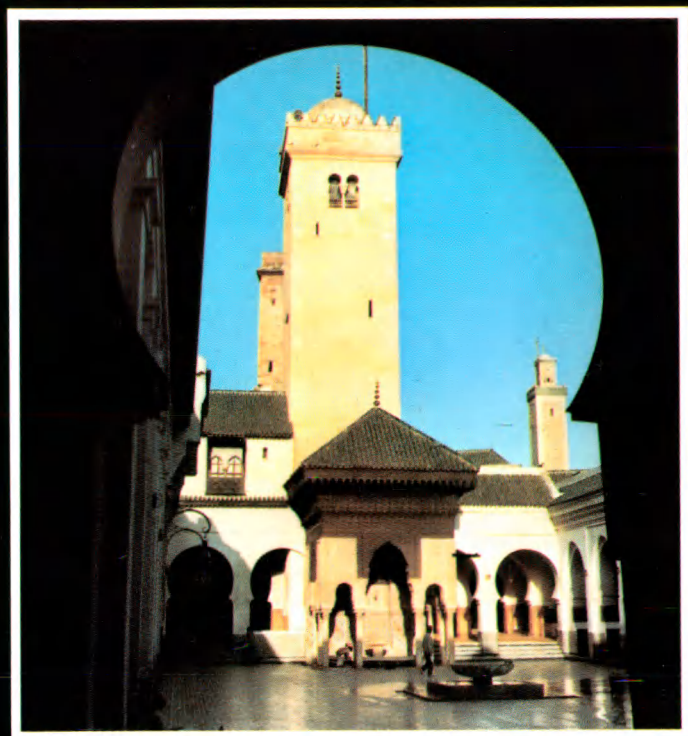


GENERAL HISTORY OF AFRICA · Abridged Edition

III Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century

EDITOR I. HRBEK



JAMES CURREY · CALIFORNIA · UNESCO

General History of Africa · III

Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century

Abridged Edition

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Preface

AMADOU-MAHTAR M'BOW

Former Director-General of UNESCO (1974–1987)

For a long time, all kinds of myths and prejudices concealed the true history of Africa from the world at large. African societies were looked upon as societies that could have no history. In spite of important work done by such pioneers as Leo Frobenius, Maurice Delafosse and Arturo Labriola, as early as the first decades of this century, a great many non-African experts could not rid themselves of certain preconceptions and argued that the lack of written sources and documents made it impossible to engage in any scientific study of such societies.

Although the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were rightly regarded as essential sources for the history of ancient Greece, African oral tradition, the collective memory of peoples which holds the thread of many events marking their lives, was rejected as worthless. In writing the history of a large part of Africa, the only sources used were from outside the continent, and the final product gave a picture not so much of the paths actually taken by the African peoples as of those that the authors thought they must have taken. Since the European Middle Ages were often used as a yardstick, modes of production, social relations and political institutions were visualized only by reference to the European past.

In fact, there was a refusal to see Africans as the creators of original cultures which flowered and survived over the centuries in patterns of their own making and which historians are unable to grasp unless they forgo their prejudices and rethink their approach.

Furthermore, the continent of Africa was hardly ever looked upon as a historical entity. On the contrary, emphasis was laid on everything likely to lend credence to the idea that a split had existed, from time immemorial, between a 'white Africa' and a 'black Africa', each unaware of the other's existence. The Sahara was often presented as an impenetrable space preventing any intermingling of ethnic groups and peoples or any exchange of goods, beliefs, customs and ideas between the societies that had grown up on either side of the desert. Hermetic frontiers were drawn between the civilizations of Ancient Egypt and Nubia and those of the peoples south of the Sahara.

It is true that the history of Africa north of the Sahara has been more closely linked with that of the Mediterranean basin than has the history of sub-Saharan Africa, but it is now widely recognized that the various civilizations of the African continent, for all their differing languages and cultures, represent, to a greater or lesser degree, the

historical offshoots of a set of peoples and societies united by bonds centuries old.

Another phenomenon that did great disservice to the objective study of the African past was the appearance, with the slave trade and colonization, of racial stereotypes that bred contempt and lack of understanding and became so deep-rooted that they distorted even the basic concepts of historiography. From the time when the notions of 'white' and 'black' were used as generic labels by the colonialists, who were regarded as superior, the colonized Africans had to struggle against both economic and psychological enslavement. Africans were identifiable by the colour of their skin, they had become a kind of merchandise, they were earmarked for hard labour and eventually, in the minds of those dominating them, they came to symbolize an imaginary and allegedly inferior 'Negro' race. This pattern of spurious identification relegated the history of the African peoples in many minds to the rank of ethno-history, in which appreciation of the historical and cultural facts was bound to be warped.

The situation has changed significantly since the end of the Second World War and in particular since the African countries became independent and began to take an active part in the life of the international community and in the mutual exchanges that are its *raison d'être*. An increasing number of historians has endeavoured to tackle the study of Africa with a more rigorous, objective and open-minded outlook by using – with all due precautions – actual African sources. In exercising their right to take the historical initiative. Africans themselves have felt a deep-seated need to re-establish the historical authenticity of their societies on solid foundations.

In this context, the importance of the eight-volume *General History of Africa*, which Unesco is publishing, speaks for itself.

The experts from many countries working on this project began by laying down the theoretical and methodological basis for the *History*. They have been at pains to call in question the over-simplifications arising from a linear and restrictive conception of world history and to re-establish the true facts wherever necessary and possible. They have endeavoured to highlight the historical data that give a clearer picture of the evolution of the different peoples of Africa in their specific socio-cultural setting.

To tackle of this huge task, made all the more complex and difficult by the vast range of sources and the fact that documents were widely scattered, Unesco has had to proceed by stages. The first stage, from 1965 to 1969, was devoted to gathering documentation and planning the work. Operational assignments were conducted in the field and included campaigns to collect oral traditions, the creation of regional documentation centres for oral traditions, the collection of unpublished manuscripts in Arabic and Ajami (African languages written in Arabic script), the compilation of archival inventories and the preparation of the *Guide to the Sources of the History of Africa*, culled from the archives and libraries of the countries of Europe and later published in eleven volumes. In addition, meetings were organized to enable experts from Africa and other continents to discuss questions of methodology and lay down the broad lines for the project after careful examination of the available sources.

The second stage, which lasted from 1969 to 1971, was devoted to shaping the *History* and linking its different parts. The purpose of the international meetings of experts held in Paris in 1969 and Addis Ababa in 1970 was to study and define the problems involved in drafting and publishing the *History*: presentation in eight

volumes, the principal edition in English, French and Arabic, translation into African languages such as Kiswahili, Hausa, Fulfulde, Yoruba or Lingala, prospective versions in German, Russian, Portuguese, Spanish and Chinese, as well as abridged editions designed for a wide African and international public.¹

The third stage has involved actual drafting and publication. This began with the appointment of the 39-member International Scientific Committee, two-thirds African and one-third non-African, which assumes intellectual responsibility for the *History*.

The method used is interdisciplinary and is based on a multifaceted approach and a wide variety of sources. The first among these is archaeology, which holds many of the keys to the history of African cultures and civilizations. Thanks to archaeology, it is now acknowledged that Africa was very probably the cradle of mankind and the scene – in the Neolithic period – of one of the first technological revolutions in history. Archaeology has also shown that Egypt was the setting for one of the most brilliant ancient civilizations of the world. But another very important source is oral tradition, which, after being long despised, has now emerged as an invaluable instrument for discovering the history of Africa, making it possible to follow the movements of its different peoples in both space and time, to understand the African vision of the world from the inside and to grasp the original features of the values on which the cultures and institutions of the continent are based.

We are indebted to the International Scientific Committee in charge of this *General History of Africa*, and to its Rapporteur and the editors and authors of the various volumes and chapters, for having shed a new light on the African past in its authentic and all-encompassing form and for having avoided any dogmatism in the study of essential issues. Among these issues we might cite: the slave trade, that ‘endlessly bleeding wound’, which was responsible for one of the cruellest mass deportations in the history of mankind, which sapped the African continent of its life-blood while contributing significantly to the economic and commercial expansion of Europe; colonization, with all the effects it had on population, economics, psychology and culture; relations between Africa south of the Sahara and the Arab world; and, finally, the process of decolonization and nation-building which mobilized the intelligence and passion of people still alive and sometimes still active today. All these issues have been broached with a concern for honesty and rigour which is not the least of the *History*’s merits. By taking stock of our knowledge of Africa, putting forward a variety of viewpoints on African cultures and offering a new reading of history, the *History* has the signal advantage of showing up the light and shade and of openly portraying the differences of opinion that may exist between scholars.

By demonstrating the inadequacy of the methodological approaches which have long been used in research on Africa, this *History* calls for a new and careful study of the twofold problem areas of historiography and cultural identity, which are united by links of reciprocity. Like any historical work of value, the *History* paves the way for a great deal of further research on a variety of topics.

1. At the time of going to press Volumes I and II have been published in Arabic, Chinese, Italian, Korean, Portuguese and Spanish, Volume IV in Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese, and Volume VII in Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese. Volume I is also published in Kiswahili and Hausa, and Volume II in Hausa.

It is for this reason that the International Scientific Committee, in close collaboration with Unesco, decided to embark on additional studies in an attempt to go deeper into a number of issues that will permit a clearer understanding of certain aspects of the African past. The findings being published in the series 'Unesco Studies and Documents – General History of Africa'² will prove a useful supplement to the *History*, as will the works planned on aspects of national or subregional history.

The *General History* sheds light both on the historical unity of Africa and on its relations with the other continents, particularly the Americas and the Caribbean. For a long time, the creative manifestations of the descendants of Africans in the Americas were lumped together by some historians as a heterogeneous collection of 'Africanisms'. Needless to say, this is not the attitude of the authors of the *History*, in which the resistance of the slaves shipped to America, the constant and massive participation of the descendants of Africans in the struggles for the initial independence of America and in national liberation movements, are rightly perceived for what they were: vigorous assertions of identity, which helped forge the universal concept of mankind. Although the phenomenon may vary in different places, it is now quite clear that ways of feeling, thinking, dreaming and acting in certain nations of the western hemisphere have been marked by their African heritage. The cultural inheritance of Africa is visible everywhere, from the southern United States to northern Brazil, across the Caribbean and on the Pacific seaboard. In certain places it even underpins the cultural identity of some of the most important elements of the population.

The *History* also clearly brings out Africa's relations with southern Asia across the Indian Ocean and the African contributions to other civilizations through mutual exchanges.

I am convinced that the efforts of the peoples of Africa to conquer or strengthen their independence, secure their development and assert their cultural characteristics must be rooted in historical awareness renewed, keenly felt and taken up by each succeeding generation.

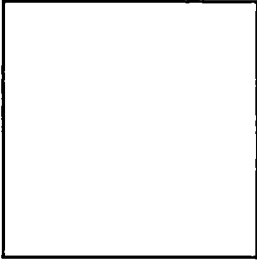
My own background, the experience I gained as a teacher and as chairman, from the early days of independence, of the first commission set up to reform history and geography curricula in some of the countries of West and Central Africa, taught me how necessary it was for the education of young people and for the information of the public at large to have a history book produced by scholars with inside knowledge of the problems and hopes of Africa and with the ability to apprehend the continent in its entirety.

For all these reasons, Unesco's goal will be to ensure that this *General History of Africa* is widely disseminated in a large number of languages and is used as a basis for producing children's books, school textbooks and radio and television programmes. Young people, whether schoolchildren or students, and adults in Africa and elsewhere will

2. The following eleven volumes have already been published in this series: *The peopling of ancient Egypt and the deciphering of Merotic script*; *The African slave trade from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century*; *Historical relations across the Indian Ocean*; *The historiography of Southern Africa*; *The decolonization of Africa, Southern Africa and the Horn of Africa*; *African ethnonyms and toponyms*; *Historical and socio-cultural relations between black Africa and the Arab world from 1935 to the present*; *The methodology of contemporary African history*; *Africa and the Second World War*; *The educational process and historiography in Africa, Libya Antiqua*

thus be able to form a truer picture of the African continent's past and the factors that explain it, as well as a fairer understanding of its cultural heritage and its contribution to the general progress of mankind. The *History* should thus contribute to improved international co-operation and stronger solidarity among peoples in their aspirations to justice, progress and peace. This is, at least, my most cherished hope.

It remains for me to express my deep gratitude to the members of the International Scientific Committee, the Rapporteur, the different volume editors, the authors and all those who have collaborated in this tremendous undertaking. The work they have accomplished and the contribution they have made plainly go to show how people from different backgrounds, but all imbued with the same spirit of goodwill and enthusiasm in the service of universal truth, can, within the international framework provided by Unesco, bring to fruition a project of considerable scientific and cultural import. My thanks also go to the organizations and governments whose generosity has made it possible for Unesco to publish this *History* in different languages and thus ensure that it will have the world-wide impact it deserves and thereby serve the international community as a whole.



Description of the Project

B. A. OGOT¹

Former President, International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa (1978-1983)

The General Conference of Unesco at its 16th Session instructed the Director-General to undertake the drafting of a *General History of Africa*. The enormous task of implementing the project was entrusted to an International Scientific Committee which was established by the Executive Board in 1970. This Committee, under the Statutes adopted by the Executive Board of Unesco in 1971, is composed of thirty-nine members (two-thirds of whom are African and one-third non-African) serving in their personal capacity and appointed by the Director-General of Unesco for the duration of the Committee's mandate.

The first task of the Committee was to define the principal characteristics of the work. These were defined at the first session of the Committee as follows:

- (a) Although aiming at the highest possible scientific level, the *History* does not seek to be exhaustive and is a work of synthesis avoiding dogmatism. In many respects, it is a statement of problems showing the present state of knowledge and the main trends in research, and it does not hesitate to show divergencies of views where these exist. In this way, it prepares the ground for future work.
- (b) Africa is considered in this work as a totality. The aim is to show the historical relationships between the various parts of the continent, too frequently subdivided in works published to date. Africa's historical connections with the other continents receive due attention, these connections being analysed in terms of mutual exchanges and multilateral influences, bringing out, in its appropriate light, Africa's contribution to the history of mankind.
- (c) The *General History of Africa* is, in particular, a history of ideas and civilizations, societies and institutions. It is based on a wide variety of sources, including oral tradition and art forms.
- (d) The *History* is viewed essentially from the inside. Although a scholarly work, it is also, in large measure, a faithful reflection of the way in which African authors view their own civilization. While prepared in an international framework and drawing to the full on the present stock of scientific knowledge, it should also

1. During the Sixth Plenary Session of the International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa (Brazzaville, August 1983), an election of the new Bureau was held and Professor Ogot was replaced by Professor Albert Adu Boahen.

be a vitally important element in the recognition of the African heritage and should bring out the factors making for unity in the continent. This effort to view things from within is the novel feature of the project and should, in addition to its scientific quality, give it great topical significance. By showing the true face of Africa, the *History* could, in an era absorbed in economic and technical struggles, offer a particular conception of human values.

The Committee has decided to present the work covering over three million years of African history in eight volumes, each containing about eight hundred pages of text with illustrations, photographs, maps and line drawings.

A chief editor, assisted if necessary by one or two assistant editors, is responsible for the preparation of each volume. The editors are elected by the Committee either from among its members or from outside by a two-thirds majority. They are responsible for preparing the volumes in accordance with the decisions and plans adopted by the Committee. On scientific matters, they are accountable to the Committee or, between two sessions of the Committee, to its Bureau for the contents of the volumes, the final version of the texts, the illustrations and, in general, for all scientific and technical aspects of the *History*. The Bureau ultimately approves the final manuscript. When it considers the manuscript ready for publication, it transmits it to the Director-General of Unesco. Thus the Committee, or the Bureau between committee sessions, remains fully in charge of the project.

Each volume consists of some thirty chapters. Each chapter is the work of a principal author assisted, if necessary, by one or two collaborators. The authors are selected by the Committee on the basis of their curricula vitae. Preference is given to African authors, provided they have requisite qualifications. Special effort is also made to ensure, as far as possible, that all regions of the continent, as well as other regions having historical or cultural ties with Africa, are equitably represented among the authors.

When the editor of a volume has approved texts of chapters, they are then sent to all members of the Committee for criticism. In addition, the text of the volume editor is submitted for examination to a Reading Committee, set up within the International Scientific Committee on the basis of the members' fields of competence. The Reading Committee analyses the chapters from the standpoint of both substance and form. The Bureau then gives final approval to the manuscripts.

Such a seemingly long and involved procedure has proved necessary, since it provides the best possible guarantee of the scientific objectivity of the *General History of Africa*. There have, in fact, been instances when the Bureau has rejected manuscripts or insisted on major revisions or even reassigned the drafting of a chapter to another author. Occasionally, specialists in a particular period of history or in a particular question are consulted to put the finishing touches to a volume.

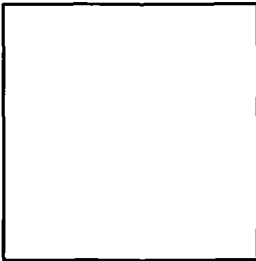
The work will be published first in a hard-cover edition in English, French and Arabic, and later in paperback editions in the same languages. An abridged version in English will serve as a basis for translation into African languages. The Committee has chosen Kiswahili and Hausa as the first African languages into which the work will be translated.

Also, every effort will be made to ensure publication of the *General History of Africa*

in other languages of wide international currency such as Chinese, Portuguese, Russian, German, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, etc.

It is thus evident that this is a gigantic task which constitutes an immense challenge to African historians and to the scholarly community at large, as well as to Unesco, under whose auspices the work is being done. For the writing of a continental history of Africa, covering the last three million years, using the highest canons of scholarship and involving, as it must do, scholars drawn from diverse countries, cultures, ideologies and historical traditions, is surely a complex undertaking. It constitutes a continental, international and interdisciplinary project of great proportions.

In conclusion, I would like to underline the significance of this work for Africa and for the world. At a time when the peoples of Africa are striving towards unity and greater co-operation in shaping their individual destinies, a proper understanding of Africa's past, with an awareness of common ties among Africans and between Africa and other continents, should not only be a major contribution towards mutual understanding among the people of the earth, but also a source of knowledge of a cultural heritage that belongs to all mankind.



Note on chronology

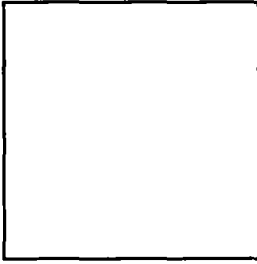
It has been agreed to adopt the following method for writing dates. With regard to prehistory, dates may be written in two different ways.

One way is by reference to the present era, that is, dates BP (before present), the reference year being + 1950; all dates are negative in relation to + 1950.

The other way is by reference to the beginning of the Christian era. Dates are represented in relation to the Christian era by a simple + or - sign before the date. When referring to centuries, the terms BC and AD are replaced by 'before the Christian era' and 'of the Christian era'.

Some examples are as follows:

- | | | |
|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| (i) | 2300 BP | = - 350 |
| (ii) | 2900 BC | = - 2900 |
| | AD 1800 | = + 1800 |
| (iii) | Fifth century BC = Fifth century before the Christian era | |
| | Third century AD = Third century of the Christian era. | |



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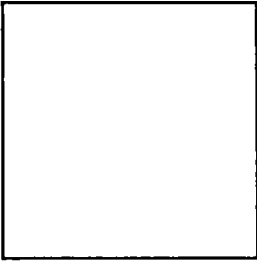
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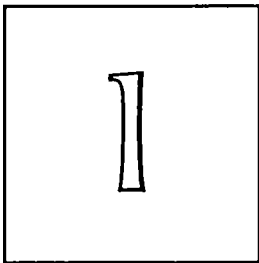


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*The abridged version was prepared from the texts
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Africa in the context of world history

The rise of the Islamic world

If a visitor had looked at the Old World at the beginning of the seventh century of the Christian era and had then revisited it after five centuries – in 1100 – he might well have come to the conclusion that the world was on the way to becoming Muslim.

At the time of his first visit, the community around Prophet Muḥammad, who preached Islam in the small Arabian town of Mecca, numbered less than one hundred people fighting for their survival against the growing hostility of their compatriots. Five centuries later, the adherents of this faith were to be found on a territory stretching from the banks of the river Ebro, Senegal and Niger in the west, to the Syr-Darya and Indus in the east, and from the Volga to the East African coast. Although at this time the Islamic world had already lost its former political unity, it still represented a fairly homogeneous culture and civilization whose creativity and potential for expansion were by no means exhausted.

In the mean time, Islam had ceased to be an exclusive Arab religion; born in the sun-scorched peninsula of Arabia, it was able to acclimatize itself in various regions of the world and among many diverse peoples who in their turn became fiery champions of Islam, spreading the faith in new directions.

It is no wonder that such a magnificent achievement should have impressed our visitor, as it did many historians who did not hesitate to call the period from the seventh to the eleventh centuries – and even thereafter – ‘the Islamic age’. This label does not imply that the Muslim peoples dominated the whole world or that they exercised a decisive political, religious or cultural influence outside their own sphere. It has to be understood in relation to other cultural zones and in the sense that the Islamic world was, during that period, the most dynamic and the most progressive in several areas of human activity.

The Arab conquests in the seventh and eighth centuries produced two momentous and lasting effects. The more immediate and dramatic of these was the creation of a new world state in the Mediterranean basin and the Near East.¹ The second effect,

1. On the rise of the Caliphate, see Chapter 2 of this volume.

less rapid and tumultuous but no less important, was the development of a new world culture within this state.

By the end of the eleventh century, the original Arab empire had ceased to exist and had been transformed instead into the Muslim world of the Middle Ages. It was a world rather than an empire – a political realm consisting of individual states, yet aware of a common identity that distinguished it from other world regions, based as it was on a common religion rather than on ethnic or tribal bonds.

The second lasting outcome of the original Arab conquest was the creation of a new world culture. The Arab conquerors used both their new faith, Islam, and their military prowess to establish an empire, but the culture they brought from their desert home was rather unsophisticated and simple. Apart from their religion, they contributed their language as the main vehicle of administration, literature and science.

The distinctive and rich civilization which characterized the Muslim world at its height came into being through an amalgam of the varied traditions of all the peoples who adopted Islam or lived under its sway. It not only inherited the material and intellectual achievements of the Near Eastern and Mediterranean civilizations, but also appropriated and absorbed many elements of Indian and Chinese origin and was instrumental in their further dissemination.

The Muslim empire was built up in the region of the most ancient world civilization, where the conquering Arabs found an age-long tradition of urban life and urban economy. They were very quick to seize this opportunity and besides settling in ancient towns they founded many new ones. It was this urban character of the Muslim world and civilization that most profoundly marked its difference from the Christian West in the early Middle Ages. The most important centres of economic and cultural life were to be found in the Muslim core lands, whereas Western Europe at that time displayed a quite different picture of scattered rural communities, with only a minimum of commercial and intellectual activity. The growing trading currents between various parts of the Muslim world and beyond its frontiers stimulated the local production of commodities for markets in other places. It also stimulated advances in applied and theoretical techniques, such as in navigation and the allied fields of shipbuilding, astronomy and geography, as well as in commercial and banking practices.

The economic boom that started in the eighth century was, to a great extent, brought about by the flow of precious metals to the central lands of the Near East. The increase in the gold supply in the ninth century led to a change in the monetary system: the countries where only silver coins had formerly circulated went over to bimetallism and all the mints in the eastern parts of the Caliphate began to strike gold dinars. In the western part of the Muslim world, the situation was different; for a long time, the Maghrib and Muslim Spain remained in the orbit of silver currency, mainly for want of readily accessible gold mines. This began to change only in the tenth century with the increase of gold imports from the western Sudan and reached its high point with the Almoravid dinar, which became an internationally recognized currency unit.²

The Muslim empire was favoured also by its central position in the heart of the Old

2. See Chapter 14 of this volume.

World. The sheer extent of the Muslim world created a unique situation inasmuch as it was the only one of the great cultural areas to be in direct contact with all the others – with Byzantium, Western Europe, India and China alike; this geographical position also enabled the Muslims to come into contact with the great frontier areas and new peoples in the Eurasian plains, in Central Asia, across the Sahara in the Sudan, and in South-east Asia.

Its central position predestined the Muslim world to the role of intermediary – or channel – between all the other regions of the Old World. Along with commercial commodities transported by land and sea routes went also many new ideas and concepts, and innovations in technology and the sciences. The case of paper serves as an early example of an important product that travelled all the way from China through the Muslim lands to Europe. Originally a Chinese invention, it was introduced to the Muslim empire by Chinese prisoners of war who were brought to Samarkand in 751, where they taught paper-making technology to the Muslims. Indeed, Samarkand became the first place in the Muslim world to have a paper industry. From there the industry spread westwards, reaching Muslim Spain in the first half of the tenth century. In the twelfth century, it was introduced to Catalonia, the first European country to produce paper. It is hardly necessary to stress the far-reaching consequences of the spread of one of the greatest inventions for culture and civilization generally.

Similarly, the Indian invention of positional notation in mathematics, the so-called Arabic numerals, had already been adopted by the Muslims (who called them Indian numerals) by the eighth century and that system had become known to the Western world by the tenth century. The adoption of positional numeration by the Muslims paved the way for the evolution of algebra, which then became the foundation without which the modern branches of mathematics and the natural sciences could not have existed.

The Islamic world and Africa

The history of Islamic Egypt between the seventh and the end of the eleventh centuries offers a fascinating picture of the pattern whereby an important but somewhat peripheral province of the Caliphate became the core land of a new powerful Fāṭimid empire, developing from a mere granary to the most important entrepôt for trade between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, from a situation where it was a rather poor relative in the field of Muslim intellectual activities to one where it was a major centre of Arab cultural life.³ In terms of its relationship to other parts of Africa, Egypt performed a variety of roles: it was the starting-point both of the Arab conquests in the Maghrib in the seventh century and of the Hilālī invasion in the eleventh century. From Egypt the Arab Bedouins penetrated gradually into Nubia, thereby preparing the way for the final downfall of its Christian kingdoms and the Arabization of the Nilotic Sudan. Although Egypt lost its Christian character during this period, the Alexandrian patriarchate still retained its control over the Monophysite churches of Nubia and Ethiopia. Nor can it be forgotten that Egypt was also the destination of the large

3. See Chapter 7 of this volume.

number of black African slaves imported there from Nubia, Ethiopia, and Western and Central Sudan.

North Africa occupied an essential strategic place in the Muslim world both politically and economically. It was from the Maghrib that the conquest of Spain and Sicily started, with all its consequences for the history of the western Mediterranean and Europe. Muslim domination reintroduced the Maghrib into the orbit of a large world-wide economy, in which it played a very important role; during this period, it underwent further demographic and urban growth and enjoyed fresh economic and commercial prosperity.

From the religious point of view, the role of the Berbers was twofold. First, their democratic and egalitarian traditions led them from very early on to adhere to the teachings of those Islamic sects preaching those tendencies.⁴ Although, after having flourished for some centuries, Berber *Khāridjism* was crushed and remained alive only in a few small communities, the spirit of reform and populism remained an integral part of Islam in the Maghrib. It revealed itself in the great movements of the Almoravids and Almohads, as well as in the proliferation of the *Ṣūfī* brotherhoods.

The second achievement of the Berbers – as seen in both the Islamic and the African perspective – was the introduction of Islam to trans-Saharan Africa. The caravans of the Berber traders carried not only material products but also new religious and cultural ideas, which had initially found a response among the commercial class and later at the courts of African rulers.⁵ A second wave of Islamization of the Sudanic belt came about in the eleventh century with the rise of the Almoravids, an authentically Berber religious movement.

It was the opening up of the Sahara and the Sudan that conferred on North Africa its specific significance for the economy of the Muslim world. The inflows of Sudanese gold brought about an economic boom, which enabled many Muslim dynasties in the West to go over from silver to gold currency. The exploitation of the Saharan salt-mines was stepped up in response to the growing demand for that indispensable mineral in sub-Saharan Africa. The trade with sub-Saharan Africa was probably the most profitable branch of Muslim foreign trade for many centuries. Although the Sudan was not conquered by the Arabs or other Muslim peoples and never formed a constituent part of the Caliphate, it was exposed to the ever-increasing impact of the Muslim world through commercial and cultural contacts.

The rapid expansion of Islamic power caused considerable damage to the economic life of Ethiopia by cutting it from access to the Red Sea. A further outcome of Muslim supremacy in the coastal regions was the shifting of the centre of the Ethiopian state to the south and a more energetic movement of expansion in that direction. These southern regions in their turn became the core from which the revival of the Christian Ethiopian state started in the ninth century.

The role which the Islamic empire played in regard to Africa during these five centuries can be summarized as follows:

4. See Chapters 9 and 20 of this volume.

5. See Chapter 3 of this volume for further information on the spread of Islam.

- (1) The Mediterranean façade of the continent had been fully incorporated into the Islamic world. It ceased for ever to be part of the Christian world and served as the starting-point for further Muslim expansion in Spain and Sicily on the one hand and in the Sahara and Sudan on the other.
- (2) In North-east Africa, it brought about the weakening of the Christian states of Nubia and Ethiopia, although neither of them was conquered. Whereas Nubia eventually lost its Christian character, Ethiopia survived as an independent political and cultural unit, although it had to accommodate its external relations to the growing influence of Islam surrounding it.
- (3) The Sahara and a large part of the Sudan were linked through the trade network to the Islamic economic sphere in which their main exports, gold and slaves, played an increasingly important role. The religion and culture of Islam penetrated along the trade routes and gradually came to be incorporated into the African ways of life.
- (4) In East Africa, the role of international trade was similar, with the exception that the Islamic influence did not penetrate into the interior. But the growing demand, in Muslim countries and India, for gold from Zimbabwe seems to have led to some changes even in the Zambezi region. Some parts of Madagascar and the Comoro Islands were also made a part of the great Indian Ocean commercial network.

Medieval Europe and Africa

In the seventh century, Europe was divided into three areas that differed profoundly in the stages they had reached in their overall development. These were the Byzantine empire, the former Roman provinces of Western Europe now under the domination of various Germanic peoples, and lastly the part east of the Rhine and north of the Danube inhabited by Germanic and Slavonic peoples.

The Byzantine empire

Only the Byzantine empire could claim to continue the Graeco-Roman tradition and to have a truly developed state organization with an efficient administration, a prospering money economy and a high degree of cultural activities in many fields. From its Asiatic provinces and Egypt, the Byzantines attempted to reopen the trade routes to the East both by land (the Great Silk Road to China) and by sea (through the Red Sea to India). These attempts were, however, frustrated by the other great regional power, the Sassanian Persian empire. The struggle between these empires continued from the mid-sixth century until the first third of the seventh century and exhausted both sides financially and militarily, so that they were unable to withstand the onslaught of the Muslim Arabs.

In relation to Africa, Byzantium ceased to play any significant role in the course of the seventh century. Egypt was lost at a very early date and sporadic attempts to reconquer it from the sea were not successful; some coastal regions of North Africa remained in Byzantine hands until the end of the same century. The Orthodox State Church

had never been strong in the African provinces because the Egyptians clung tenaciously to their Monophysite creed, and the North African urban population to the Roman Church. Whatever influence the Orthodox Church had had in previous centuries was lost for ever through the Muslim conquest. Although Nubia had never formed part of the Byzantine empire, Byzantine cultural and religious influence remained comparatively strong even after the Arab conquest of Egypt, especially in Makuria, the central of the three Christian Nubian states, which adopted – in contrast to the others – the Orthodox (Melkite) creed. The administration was modelled on Byzantine bureaucracy, and the upper classes dressed in Byzantine manner and spoke Greek. But gradually the links with the Byzantine culture and religion were weakened and, at the end of the seventh century, the king of Makuria introduced Monophysitism into his state, which was by then united with the northern Nobadia.⁶

During its struggle against Persia, Byzantium was interested in forming an alliance with Christian Ethiopia, despite its being Monophysite. The Arab expansion cut off Byzantium from the Red Sea and trade with India, thus making the alliance impossible as well as impracticable. As Monophysite Christianity increasingly became the symbol of the Ethiopian state and nation, hostile both to Islam and to other forms of Christianity, it developed its own original identity without any reference to Byzantine models, whether in theology or in artistic and literary forms of expression.

Western Europe

Between the fourth and seventh centuries, all the territory west of the Rhine and south of the Alps, including parts of the British Isles, became the setting for great migrations of the Germanic peoples.

These migrations left Western Europe severely devastated: it ceased to be an urban civilization and became instead a civilization of small agricultural settlements which kept only the vestiges of a mutual pattern of relations.

During the seventh century, however, Western Europe was able to reorganize itself into a number of more or less stable territorial units. In the west, the Visigoths dominated the entire Iberian peninsula, while in Gaul and adjacent lands the Frankish Merovingians established their domination and in England the Anglo-Saxons founded their kingdoms. At the end of the century, Italy was divided among the Byzantines in the south and the newly arrived Germanic Longobards in the north.

The Arabo-Berber conquest of Visigothic Spain at the beginning of the eighth century amputated a considerable part of the Latin West. The Franks were able to stop further Muslim penetration into Gaul, but Arab incursions and raids on the coastal settlements in southern France and in Italy continued for more than two centuries, contributing to the general climate of insecurity in the Mediterranean. Nevertheless at the end of the same century the first – and, for a long time, the only – successful attempt was made to give a political unity to Western Europe; this was the work of the Carolingians and of Charlemagne (768–814). However, many parts of Western Europe remained outside this empire, including the British Isles, the larger part of Spain under Muslim

6. See Volume II, Chapter 12, and Volume III, Chapter 8.

rule, and southern Italy, which was still in Byzantine and Lombardian hands.

The name of Charlemagne is connected with the celebrated thesis of the Belgian historian, Henri Pirenne, which has given rise to vigorous debate concerning the relationship between the emergence of the Muslim empire and the fate of Western Europe. According to Pirenne, it was not the invasions of the barbarian Germanic tribes that put an end to Rome's control of trade in the Mediterranean, but rather the creation of the Muslim empire. The Arabs' success in wresting North Africa and the eastern provinces from Byzantium created a final break between East and West. This forced Western Europe to look inwards and turn to its own resources and to find a substitute for the maritime economy of the Merovingians in the land-locked and continental Carolingian economy, as a result of which Western Europe became poor and barbarian. Stagnation was overcome only after the tenth century, with the emergence of a new European urbanism.

Although this thesis has been rejected by the majority of historians, it has drawn attention to important problems of change in medieval economies and of the rise of European feudalism. It also made historians aware of the impact of the Arabs and their domination of North Africa on developments in Europe, a neglected theme.

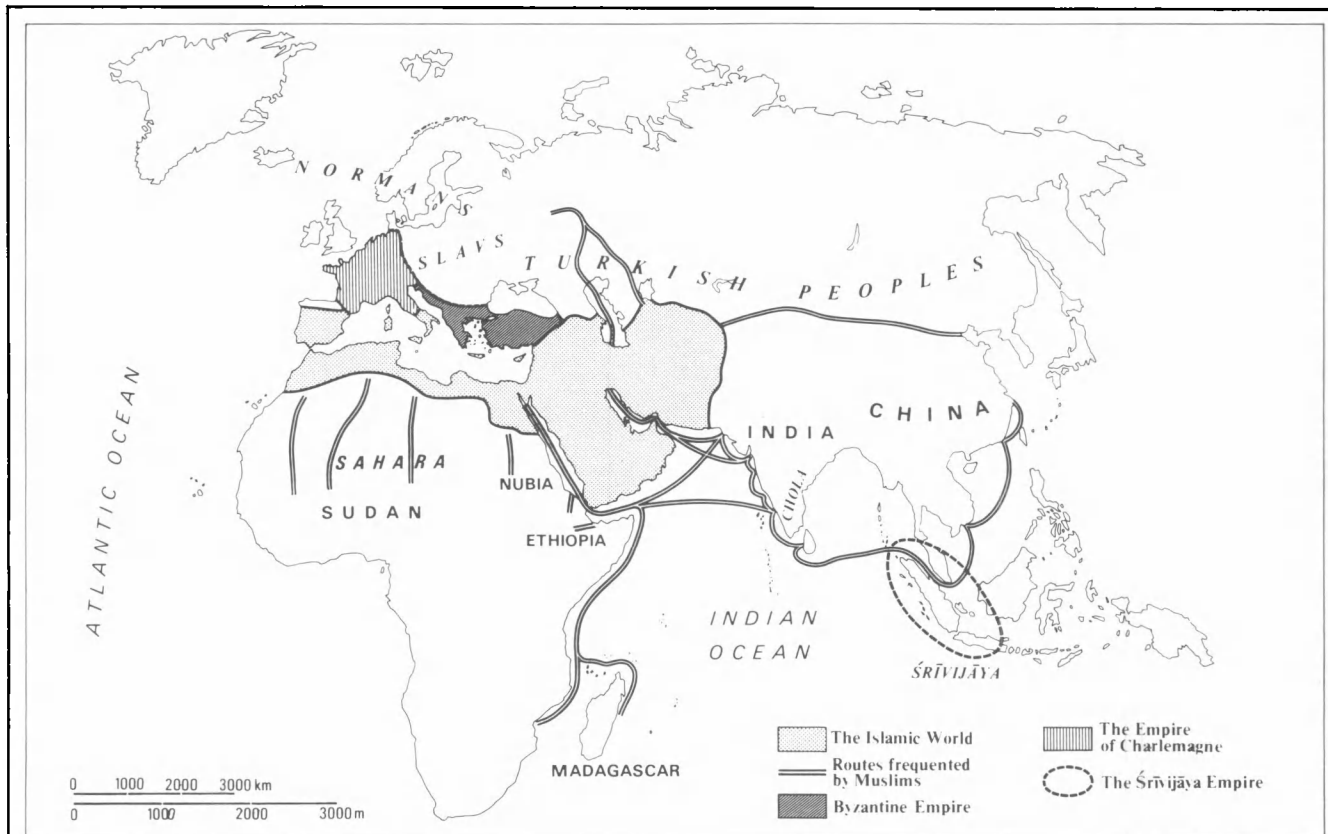
The main weak point of Pirenne's thesis was that he attributed such far-reaching consequences to the interruption of long-distance trade. Such long-distance trade, however lucrative or whatever its scale, did not play all that decisive a role in the social and economic life of Western Europe.

The lasting Arab and Islamic impact on Europe did not result from military confrontation or the interruption of trade contacts across the Mediterranean, but rather from the long years of Muslim rule in Spain and Sicily. Through the innovations brought to these regions in the shape of new crops, agricultural processes and technology, and especially in the sciences and philosophy, new concepts were introduced into Europe, which was less developed in these matters than the Islamic world. Although the European Renaissance began later – from the thirteenth century onwards – the foundations from which it arose were, in fact, laid in the period of the greatest flowering of Islamic civilization, i.e. between the eighth and twelfth centuries.

Eastern and Northern Europe

In the rest of Europe, the westward migrations of the Germanic tribes opened the way for Slavonic expansion, which took two general directions: southwards across the Danube to the Balkans and westwards into the territory of present-day Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and eastern Germany.

With regard to the Muslim world, the Slavonic peoples were, for some centuries, to play a role similar to that of the black Africans, in that they were imported as slaves. It is significant that in all the Western European languages the word for 'slave' (Sklave, esclave, esclavo, escravo, etc.) is derived from the ethnonym 'Slav', the name which the various Slavonic peoples used for themselves. This points to the fact that, during the formative period of the European national languages, which coincides precisely with the period under discussion, Slavonic prisoners of war must have formed the bulk of the slave population in Western Europe. As victims of incessant wars and raids, they



1.1 The Old World, c. 230-845. (I. Hrbek)

were not only retained as a labour force in Europe but were also exported abroad to the Muslim countries. Those captured in Central Europe went through the Frankish state to Muslim Spain, while those from the Balkans were mostly sold by the Venetians to North Africa. The Arabs called them "al-Şakālība" (sing., al-Şaklabī) and they were employed mainly as soldiers in state administrations and, when castrated, in harems. Whereas in al-Andalus the term "al-Şakālība" was soon extended to designate all European slaves, regardless of nationality, in the Maghrib and in Fāṭimid Egypt it retained its original meaning. And it was here in particular that the Slavs of Balkan origin did perform an important role by participating as soldiers and administrators in both the consolidation and expansion of Fāṭimid power.⁷ The most famous among them was Djawhar, the conqueror of Egypt and founder of Cairo and the al-Azhar University. Although the Slavs were soon absorbed, ethnically and culturally, by the Muslim Arab society in the Maghrib and Egypt, they nevertheless did contribute to the shaping of the destiny of these parts of North Africa in the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Between the eighth and tenth centuries, another group of peoples from beyond the horizon of the Mediterranean nations emerged on the European scene. These were the Viking (or Norman) invaders, conquerors and merchant-adventurers who set sail in their ships from their Scandinavian homes and attacked coastal regions and even some parts of the interior. Some Normans (called by the Arabs "al-Mād̲jūs") reached as far as Muslim Spain and even Morocco.

Until the eleventh century the Normans, with the exception of their raid on the Moroccan coast in 858 or 859, which remained a passing episode, did not enter into any direct contact with Africa. A group of Normans settled permanently in northern France (Normandy), and founded a strong state there. Apart from conquering England, in 1066, these same Normans also carved another state for themselves in southern Italy, from where they embarked on the conquest of Muslim Sicily, making it their base for further expansion partly directed at North Africa. For the space of one century, the Normans of Sicily became an important factor in the political history of Muslim North Africa.

In the foregoing pages, we have pointed to various implications which the Muslim presence on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, i.e. in North Africa, had for Western Europe. Although we do not subscribe to Pirenne's thesis, it nevertheless remains a historical fact that, with the Arab conquest of North Africa, the Mediterranean basin ceased to be a part of a single large cultural area as it had been in the preceding millennium and became divided between the European (or Christian) and the Arabo-Berber (or Muslim) zones, each with its own culture and each going its separate way.

From the European point of view, Africa became identified with the Muslim world, since it was from this region that the main incursions and invasions, but also various influences and ideas, were coming. When more intensive commercial contacts between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean developed at a later stage, Africa, which the Europeans then came to know, was still Muslim Africa; it is not surprising, therefore, that Africa was identified with the arch-enemy of Christianity

7. See Chapters 7 and 12 of this volume.

and that its inhabitants, irrespective of their colour, were regarded and treated accordingly. Europe's lack of any direct contacts with Africa beyond the Muslim sphere was bound to lead to the emergence of a very distorted image of the continent, and especially of its black inhabitants. Some recent studies have clearly shown how both this ignorance and the presumed identification of black Africans with Muslims fashioned the European image of them as the personification of sin, evil and inferiority. It was already in those early medieval times, that European negative attitudes, prejudice and hostility towards peoples of black skin first emerged, attitudes which were later to be strengthened by the slave trade and slavery generally.

Africa, Asia and the Indian Ocean

Since some general aspects of the Indian Ocean factor in African history have already been discussed in Volume II,⁸ we shall examine here only those developments that were significant in the period between the seventh and the eleventh centuries.

The important place occupied by the Islamic empire in inter-continental relations was demonstrated in the earlier parts of this chapter. The Indian Ocean very soon became an integral part of the steadily expanding Muslim commercial network which connected China, Indonesia, India and the East African coast with the Islamic core lands.

By contrast with the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean can be said to have generally been an ocean of peace. Although the trade relations between its peoples, going back to early times, were not always equally advantageous to all those participating in them, they were only rarely disturbed by wars. In the medieval Mediterranean, Muslim and Christian powers were engaged in a continuous struggle and, although commercial contacts never came to a complete halt, the state of hostilities was not generally conducive to trade. The expansion of Islam in the Indian Ocean did not have an adverse influence on the Arabo-Persian trading activities, since the merchants were anxious not to disturb established commercial relations by insisting on conversion by force.

This does not mean that the Indian Ocean trade was idyllic. In addition to the slave trade, which was often accompanied by hostile action and the use of force, large-scale piracy was rife throughout the period. However, it never reached the extent known in the Mediterranean, where it was fanned and even justified by religious differences.

In the second half of the ninth century, two incidents severely disrupted Muslim trade in the Indian Ocean. The first was the great Zandj revolt in the region of lower Iraq and the Arab/Persian Gulf in the years 866–83.⁹ Some of the most important ports – Baṣra, Ubulla, Abadan – were laid waste and Baghdad was cut off from access to the sea. For more than fifteen years, maritime trade in this region marked time, owing to the lack of merchant capital, goods and ships.

The second blow to Muslim trade occurred almost simultaneously, in 878, when the forces of the Chinese rebel Huang Ch'ao sacked Canton and massacred a huge number of foreign traders, mostly from Muslim countries. The lives of some merchants

8. See Volume II, Chapter 22.

9. See Chapter 26 of this volume.

were, however, apparently spared, for the same author of the account of this disaster wrote that the rebels oppressed Arab ship-masters, imposed illegal levies on the merchants and appropriated their wealth.

In the eleventh century, there was a major shift in Muslim trade, as a result of the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate in the Middle East and the simultaneous rise of the Fāṭimids on North African soil. The age-old rivalry between the route terminating in the Arab/Persian Gulf and the route leading through the Red Sea was accordingly resolved to the latter's advantage.

So far we have only spoken about the role of the Muslim Arabs and Persians in Indian Ocean interrelations. What about the others, such as the Chinese, Indians and Indonesians? To what degree did those peoples participate in these relations and what was their impact on Africa? What role did the Africans play in the Indian Ocean context?

China

In ancient and medieval times, Chinese contacts with the other main areas of the Old World – India, Western Asia and the lands around the Mediterranean – were established almost entirely through the export trade, in which the most important commodity was silk, later followed by chinaware.

Although China already possessed the technical knowledge and means needed for long-distance sea voyages across the Indian Ocean under the T'ang dynasty (618–906), it did not employ its own ships for trade beyond the Malayan peninsula. The Chinese came to know the Indian Ocean through the intermediary of the Indians and Persians, and later the Arabs. The fragmentary accounts of Africans and Africa in Chinese literary sources seem to be drawn from Muslim accounts. They accordingly came to think of the Africans as being the subjects of Muslim rulers and of their countries as forming part of the Arab empire.

Among the African goods that reached China, the most important were ivory, ambergris, frankincense and myrrh, as well as Zandj slaves.

For some time, the view was held that the history of East Africa had been written in Chinese porcelain. Indeed, an enormous quantity of Chinese porcelain has been found in the East African coastal cities, and hence such ware must have formed an important part of Chinese exports to Africa. With only a few exceptions, however, the bulk of this Chinese porcelain belongs to a period after the eleventh century. The same is true of the Chinese coins found on the coast.

The evidence thus points to the conclusion that, whereas African commodities formed a constant part of Chinese imports from early times, the arrival of Chinese goods in greater quantities could be placed only in the period after the eleventh century. As mentioned above, exchanges between China and Africa were not direct but transited through the Muslim trade network in the Indian Ocean.

India

The entire problem of India's role in the Indian Ocean, especially in the first millennium of the Christian era, is still unresolved. It is primarily bound up with the participation of Indians in international trade and with Indian influence on various parts of this

region. The task of solving this complex problem is not made any easier by the virtually total lack of evidence from Indian sources in the period under discussion.

Over the period between the seventh and the eleventh centuries, relations between Africa and India seem to have been at their lowest ebb. Contacts nevertheless existed and these were mostly connected with the exchange of goods. One of the most important African export commodities to India has always been ivory. The ivory trade was already flourishing in antiquity and there are hardly any Arabic sources that do not mention it when describing the East African coast. Al-Mas'ūdī wrote that the ivory from East Africa was destined for export to India and China and added that its main entrepôt was Oman. No evidence about other export goods is available from these centuries, but it has to be borne in mind that al-Idrīsī's (d. 1154) well-known report on African iron exports to India relates to earlier times and therefore comes within the period under review. This African product played an important role in the development of one branch of Indian industry, the production of steel blades. This seems to have been one of the rare instances of African export goods that did not come within the category of primary commodities. In this connection, it should be stressed that Africa exploited not so much iron ore, which was in any event too bulky a cargo for the capacity of the vessels of the time, as an already processed product, probably in the form of pig-iron.

Some African slaves were certainly exported to India via Arabia or Persia, but no relevant documents or other evidence has so far come to light. Nor is sufficient information available about population movements in the opposite direction, i.e. of Indians towards Africa. In some oral traditions from the coast and adjacent islands, there are a large number of references to people called *Debuli* (*Wadebuli*). Their name is considered to be derived from the great port of *al-Daybul* (*Dabhol*) on the mouth of the River Indus. The date of their arrival on the east coast is highly controversial, some traditions placing it before the conversion of the coastal towns to Islam, while others connect it with the introduction of firearms and hence at a rather late date.

All this does not rule out the possibility that some people of Indian origin had settled – most probably as traders – on the coast at earlier times. In any case, they cannot have been very numerous, since more identifiable traces, in the form of written sources or material culture, would have otherwise been preserved. Indeed, *Kiswahili* contains many loan-words of Indian origin, but it has hitherto been impossible to determine the period at which they were introduced.

Indonesia

Whereas contacts between Africa, on the one hand, and China and India, on the other, were, as stated, indirect rather than direct, there was one region on the other side of the Indian Ocean that left indubitable traces in at least some parts of Africa. The Indonesian contribution to the peopling of Madagascar has long been recognized. However, since it is discussed in other chapters of this work,¹⁰ reference is made here only to those topics that have a direct bearing on the African continent.

10 See Chapter 25 of this volume as well as Chapter 28 of Volume II.

The impact of the Indonesians on the African mainland now appears to have been exaggerated. There is virtually no evidence for direct Indonesian penetration of East Africa similar to that in Madagascar. To date, no archaeological, linguistic or somatic data have been discovered that point to a prolonged Indonesian presence. The theory propounded by Deschamps, whereby the proto-Malagasy, before settling in Madagascar, spent some time on the coast of Africa, where they mixed or married with Africans, and only then moved to the island, lacks any supporting evidence. Raymond Kent has expanded on this hypothesis by assuming that there was a movement from Indonesia into East Africa before the arrival of the Bantu-speaking groups, and that the Indonesians and Bantu subsequently met and mixed in the interior. It is from this mingling of these two peoples that the Afro-Malagasy population is presumed to have resulted. Thereafter, the expansion of the Bantu as far as the coastal areas forced this population to migrate to Madagascar.

Much has been made, especially by Murdock, of the so-called 'Malaysian botanical complex' comprising such plants as rice, bananas, taro (cocoyam), yams, breadfruit and others that came to form the staple food of many Africans. Murdock and others believed that this complex was brought to Madagascar during the first millennium before the Christian era by migrants from Indonesia, who travelled right along the coast of southern Asia before reaching the East African coast. It should be pointed out, however, that cultivated plants do not depend for their dissemination on the physical migrations of the peoples who first started to cultivate them or who had earlier adopted them, as is amply demonstrated by the dissemination of certain American crops through West and Central Africa after the sixteenth century. This, of course, does not rule out the possibility that some of the South-east Asian plants were introduced to the African mainland from Madagascar at a later stage.

There is no doubt, however, that the Indonesians were capable and accomplished navigators and that they embarked on many voyages, radiating out in all directions from their island homelands. In the second half of the first millennium, major maritime powers were to emerge in Sumatra and Java, such as the Sumatran empire of Śrīvijāya (seventh to thirteenth centuries) and the Javan state of the Śailendra dynasty (eighth century), which later also came to power in Śrīvijāya.

We are concerned here merely with those aspects of the history of those powers that have a bearing both on the general situation in the Indian Ocean region and their possible contacts with Africa. The Śrīvijāya rulers imposed control over the main export ports of the region, thereby securing a vast monopoly over the spice trade. The control of the Malacca Straits gave them an enormous advantage, since all maritime traffic had to pass through them and to call at their ports.

At the same time, the ships of Śrīvijāya participated in the Indian Ocean trade. Although there are few written Arabic sources about these voyages, they are extremely important, and the foremost of these is the well-known account of the attack by the Wāk-Wāk people on Kaṅbalū (Pemba) in 945-6.

The fact that one whole year was said to have been needed for these people to make the voyage from their homes to East Africa had already prompted the narrator to draw the conclusion that the islands of Wāk-Wāk were situated somewhere opposite China. The Muslim authors understood the term Wāk-Wāk as referring to two regions or

peoples – one somewhere in the south-western part of the Indian Ocean, including Madagascar and the African coast to the south of Sufāla, and the other in South-east Asia, in present-day Indonesia.

Some of the details of Ibn Lākīs' narrative thus point unmistakably to South-east Asia as the home of these Wāk-Wāk people. Moreover, since the Śrīvijāya empire at this period is known to have been the major maritime power in the eastern Indian Ocean, it is not altogether far-fetched to regard this long-range expedition as being an attempt to expand the area of Śrīvijāya's trade network in order to gain direct access to the sources of African commodities and thus avoid the Muslim monopoly. How far these expeditions – and al-Iḍrīsī confirms that Indonesian ships also continued to visit African shores and Madagascar in later centuries – were related to the new waves of Indonesian migrations to Madagascar between the tenth and twelfth centuries remains a problem that has yet to be solved. On the other hand, it is not impossible that these late migrations were in some way connected with the invasions or raids of the South Indian Cholas on Śrīvijāya in the first half of the eleventh century, which had the effect of weakening that state and may have led to an exodus and other population movements.

Conclusion

By comparison with the preceding period, the extent and character of the mutual contacts between the African continent and other parts of the Indian Ocean region underwent a number of quantitative and qualitative changes.

Firstly, we can observe the steadily increasing presence of Middle Eastern peoples in all parts of the area, and especially on the East African coast. This was connected with the rise of the Caliphate as a major political, cultural and economic power. The Muslims were able to monopolize the East African trade and occupy a dominant position in the external relations of this region. While these contacts undoubtedly contributed to the flourishing of some coastal cities as centres of international trade and led to the emergence of an African entrepreneurial class, it should not be forgotten that, at the same time, large numbers of African slaves were being exported outside the continent and were to contribute to the economies of various Asian countries, chiefly in the Middle East.

Secondly, there was a marked decline in direct contacts with India. Before the seventh century, Ethiopian ships trade with a number of Indian ports and these relations are clearly borne out by the treasure-troves of Indian (Kushan) coins found in Ethiopia, as well as by the many traces of Indian influence in Ethiopian material and intellectual culture. Between the seventh and the eleventh centuries, nothing comparable is to be observed: this was due mainly to the fact that the traffic between India and Ethiopia passed into the hands of Muslims.

Thirdly, the Indonesians continued to maintain contacts with Madagascar and even with some parts of the African seaboard. However, their impact on the mainland must have been negligible; the claims which some scholars have made about the decisive contribution of Indonesia to African culture have to be considered as hypotheses for which there is not sufficient evidence.

We shall now investigate the role played by peoples of African origin in the Indian Ocean context. In assessing this factor, we should bear in mind that, during this period, only a tiny part of the African continent, i.e. the narrow coastal strip, was in contact with the outside world. The number of Africans afforded an opportunity of exercising any influence or of being exposed to it must have been rather limited. Even so, their role was by no means negligible. By contrast, the Africans made a significant contribution to the far-reaching changes that took place in the destinies of a great empire. The Zandj revolt had wide-ranging consequences in the political, social and economic fields alike: it shattered the unity of the Muslim empire and paved the way for the downfall of the old Abbasid regime. The political crisis ushered in by the Zandj revolt had deepened the cleavage between the social classes, and the affluent classes, afraid for their privileges, began to place their trust in the professional armies formed of Turkish and other mercenaries as being the only force capable of keeping order. This heralded a new era in the history of the Muslim Middle East. The revolt also taught the Muslim ruling classes a lesson: there was never again any instance in the Muslim East of a large-scale enterprise based on the concentration of slave-labour, and the exploitation of slaves in agriculture and irrigation appears to have been abandoned. This, in turn, led in the next century to the rise of feudalism as the prevailing mode of production in the eastern Muslim countries, with slave exploitation giving way to the feudal model. Another contemporary consequence of the Zandj revolt seems to have been a hardening of racial feelings, in that black Africans came to be held in contempt, notwithstanding the teachings of Islam, and many previously unknown themes expressing a negative attitude towards black people emerged in Muslim literature.

Other aspects of African history during this period stemmed in part from the interaction of the various Indian Ocean regions. Among these, mention should be made of the growth of the participation of East African coastal towns in international maritime trade. Even though the shipping was controlled by foreign merchants, the producers and exporters were African coastal peoples. Although Swahili political, economic and cultural life only came into full flower in the following centuries, it was in the period covered here that the groundwork was laid.

2

The coming of Islam and the expansion of the Muslim empire

Preliminary remarks

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the coming of Islam, its political expansion and doctrinal evolution, as the background needed for a better understanding of historical and ideological issues that will be dealt with or touched upon in this as well as the remaining volumes of the *General History of Africa*.

From the Islamic point of view it is not correct to say that the Prophet Muḥammad is the founder of Islam or that he was preaching a new faith. Islam is not the name of some unique faith presented for the first time by Muḥammad, as he was the last of the prophets each reiterating the faith of his predecessor. After having from time to time sent prophets to guide mankind, God decided at last that it had reached such a degree of perfection that it was fit to receive His last revelation. His choice for the role of this last prophet fell on an Arab from the town of Mecca called Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh, belonging to the tribe of Quraysh.

Muḥammad’s predecessors in the prophetic missions were Abraham, Moses and Jesus Christ, who all preached belief in one unique God on the grounds of scriptures that were sent and revealed to them from Heaven. Those who believed in those prophets and scriptures, Jews and Christians, are called *ahl al-Kitāb*, i.e. people of the Book, and, as possessors of a part of the revealed truth, have the right to special consideration from Muslims.

Muḥammad is thus not the founder of Islam, a religion that already existed, but the last in the chain of the prophets, being the ‘Seal of the prophets’ (*khātimu l-anbiyā*). Islam venerates all preceding prophets as messengers of God’s will. According to the Islamic doctrine, Jesus was a mere mortal; although it was God’s will to make his birth a miracle, this does not mean that he had the least particle of divinity. His mother, our lady Miryam – *mawlātunā Miryam* as the Muslims call her – enjoys the greatest respect in the Islamic world. Jesus was not killed by the Jews but was recalled by God to His presence.

Muḥammad himself insisted on being only a man and made a clear distinction between his humanity and his role as Prophet. But, since it was inconceivable that Muḥammad as the Messenger of God would act contrary to divine will, belief in his guidance in wordly matters became firmly established in the Islamic faith. We will return to the role of prophetic tradition (*sunna*) later.

The life of Muḥammad

The Arabian peninsula at the eve of the seventh century of the Christian era was inhabited by a great number of politically independent tribes who together formed a linguistic and cultural community. The majority of them were nomads (Bedouins), but in South Arabia as well as in numerous oases, a sedentary population practised agriculture. Along the ancient trade route leading from the shores of the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean, there existed a few towns whose inhabitants were engaged in commerce. Mecca was the main commercial and religious centre of Arabia. The religion of the pre-Islamic Arabs was largely animistic in nature and worship was made to gods or spirits believed to inhabit rocks, trees or wells. Some of the gods were of astral origin (the Sun, the planet Venus). There was also a notion of the supreme being called Allāh, but he was not the object of worship. The idols of some of these gods were set up in an ancient sanctuary in Mecca known as the Ka'ba.

In Arabia there were also large settlements of people of Jewish faith; many of them were converted Arabs who lived mainly in oases. Christianity had found its way into Arabia from a very early date; its main centres were in South Arabia (Nadḡrān) and on the fringes of the desert in Mesopotamia and Transjordan. Individual Christians were scattered in all towns, while solitary monks lived in the desert.

But it was firstly to the pagan Arabs that Muḥammad was sent with the divine message. Born in Mecca as a posthumous son and orphaned at an early age, he had spent his life as a trader until his fortieth year. In about the year 610 of the Christian era, he received the first revelation of God dictated to him by the angel Gabriel, who ordered him to preach Islam to his fellow men. These first revelations centred on the unity of God and the last day and exhorted men not to neglect religion in favour of worldly affairs. They also set out the principles of equality of all men without regard to their social position or wealth.

When Muḥammad started his preaching and assembled around himself a small community of believers, the Meccan oligarchy of wealthy merchants and bankers became aware of the revolutionary content of the message and regarded it as a threat to their privileges. There was also the danger that Mecca as the centre of Arabic paganism, with its sanctuary of the Ka'ba, would lose its importance as a result of the new religion. Muḥammad's moral and intellectual qualities, strengthened by his Prophetic mission, made him a dangerous rival in the eyes of the oligarchy. The history of Muḥammad and his community until the year 622 is accordingly a story of persecution and even of attempts on the Prophet's life. Under these circumstances, the Prophet ordered several of the new converts to emigrate to Christian Ethiopia, where they had a friendly reception from the Negus.

When the persecutions reached their peak, Muḥammad and his followers moved to the oasis town of Yathrib, subsequently called Madīnat al-Nabī (the City of the Prophet) and shortly thereafter Medina. This took place in the year 622 of the Christian era, which thus became the first year of the Muslim calendar. The move from Mecca to Medina is known as the *hidḡra*.

Muḥammad was invited to Medina by its inhabitants, who came to be called *Anṣār* (the Helpers), while the Meccan emigrants were called *Muḥādḡirūn* (those who

undertook the *hidjra*, or Emigrants). These two groups together form the *Aṣḥāb* – the Companions (of the Prophet). In the subsequent years until his death in 632, the Prophet strengthened and governed the Muslim community (Arabic, *umma*), beating off the attacks of his Meccan enemies and gaining supremacy by means of diplomacy and war over a wide confederacy of the Arab tribes. When he was sufficiently strong, he returned to Mecca as the victor and religious and political leader whose authority was supreme. At the time when God recalled him from this life, Muḥammad was the virtual lord of almost all Arabia.

The Qoranic teachings

In both Mecca and Medina the Prophet received a continuous flow of revelations in the form of verses (*āya*, pl., *āyāt*) arranged in chapters (*sūra*, pl., *sūrāt*). The 114 *sūras* of unequal length form together the Qoran.

The Qoran is not a 'holy book' written by Muḥammad. The word means recitation and, in fact, what Muḥammad did was to recite the word of God spoken to him by the angel Gabriel.

The teachings of the Qoran are all-embracing and are intended to give man guidance in his relations with God as well as with other members of human society. The Qoranic precepts and principles form the basis of the Islamic faith.

The first principle is the absolute monotheism expressed in the credo or *shahāda*: 'There is no god but God and Muḥammad is the Prophet of God.' The belief in Muḥammad's prophethood is an integral part of this credo, for without his prophetic mission there would not be the perfection of Islam.

The *shahāda* thus forms the first of what are called the 'Five Pillars of Islam' (*arkān al-islām*). The second is the duty of every Muslim to perform the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) five times a day and to pronounce it facing in the direction of Mecca. An indispensable part of the prayer is the washing and ablution before its performance. The third pillar is the fast (*ṣaum*), which consists of forgoing all material pleasures (eating, drinking, sexual relations, etc.) from dawn to sunset during Ramaḍān, the tenth month of the lunar year. The sick, persons travelling during Ramaḍān, women in labour, workers engaged in arduous tasks and warriors in campaign are granted dispensation from the fast, provided they fast for an equivalent number of days at another time of the year. The fourth pillar is the compulsory alms known as *zakāt*, which consists in giving a part of one's wealth to the poor and to certain categories of needy persons. This portion varies from 2.5% to 10%. The *zakāt* emphasizes the importance of charity; it was collected by the Islamic community (*umma*) and then divided among the categories indicated by the Qoran. It corresponds to the modern social welfare provided by the state. The fifth pillar is the pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj*). It is in this that the universal message of Islam is most visible and evident as Muslims from every corner of the world assemble at Mecca in the month of *Dhu l-ḥijj* to perform various ceremonies there. The pilgrimage is obligatory for every Muslim, but he is compelled to carry out this duty only if he has the means to do so. For this reason, the number of people able to discharge it is small in relation to the total number of Muslims. Even so, the *ḥajj* is the largest multinational gathering of human beings on the face of the earth today;



2.1 Representation of Mecca: this plaque, which was made in Iznik, shows in elevation, the plan of the Great Mosque of Mecca with its seven minarets. In the middle of the courtyard one can see the Ka'ba – said to have been built by Abraham – in an angle of which is embedded the Black Stone where every Muslim should, if possible, come to worship at least once in his lifetime. Each small building – and each door – is designated by its name in Naskhi script. Above the plan a Qoranic inscription, also cursive (Sūra 3: 90–2), recalls the duty of pilgrimage. (Photo & copyright: Musées nationaux, Paris)

it instils in the pilgrim a deep awareness of the Islamic values and makes him a venerated person after his return.

The Day of Judgment is one of the corner-stones of the Islamic faith; the whole history of mankind will come to an end with the resurrection and the Day of Judgment. All people will appear before God at the Last Judgment, to be judged according to their deeds and then sent either to paradise (*djanna*, lit. garden) or to hell.

The Qoran also contains a number of prohibitions and recommendations for the worldly life. It forbids the eating of pork and a number of other animals and the drinking of wine and alcoholic beverages. In *Sūra* 17, verses 23–40, guidance is given as to everyday behaviour: ostentatious waste, pride and haughtiness are condemned and the faithful are ordered to give just weight and measure.

Although slavery is regarded as a recognized institution, slaves must be treated kindly, allowed to marry and encouraged to purchase their freedom. Masters are recommended to free slaves who are believers.¹

Islam proclaims the equality of men and women, but customs alien to the orthodox doctrine have masked this aspect of Islam. In law, however, Muslim women enjoyed a legal status that women in other religious systems might, until recently, have envied. Muslim women have always had the right to go to law without referring to their husbands and to administer their property independently of them.

The Qoran allows a man four legal wives; this was an advance on pre-Islamic times, when polygamy was unrestricted. Islam, moreover, subjected polygamy to such conditions that it could be regarded as having taken a step towards the abolition or at least the diminution of that social phenomenon.

Sharī'a and fiqh

Islam is not only a religion: it is a comprehensive way of life, catering for all the fields of human existence. Islam provides guidance for all aspects of life – individual and social, material and moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, national and international.

The *sharī'a* is the detailed code of conduct or set of canons governing modes and ways of worship and standards of morals and life, and the laws that allow and prescribe, and judge between right and wrong. The sources of the *sharī'a* are the Qoran and the *hadīth*, i.e. the practices of the Prophet Muḥammad as preserved and handed down by his Companions. Thousands of *hadīths* were sifted and collected by scholars in collections of traditions, the most famous of which are those of al-Bukḥārī (d. 870) and Abū Muslim (d. 875). The content of the Prophetic tradition is called *sunna*, i.e. the conduct and behaviour of Muḥammad.

The science that codifies and explains the prescripts of *sharī'a* is called *fiqh* and the scholars who are versed in it are the *faqīhs* (Arabic pl., *fukahā'*) or doctors of law: since *fiqh* is the Islamic science *par excellence*, the *faqīhs* are considered as scholars or '*ulamā'* (sing., '*ālim*).

1. For a discussion of the Islamic attitude to slavery, see Chapter 26 of this volume.

Since the Qoran seldom deals with particular cases and sets out only general principles governing the lives of Muslims, it soon became apparent that the answers to some of the problems confronting the Muslim community were to be found neither in the Holy Book nor in the *ḥadīths* of the Prophet. Two additional sources were therefore added to the Islamic law: firstly, the reasoning by analogy (*kiyās*), which consists in comparing the case for which a solution is sought with another similar case already settled on the strength of the Qoran or a particular *ḥadīth*, and, secondly, the possible resolution of a problem by the consensus of eminent doctors of law (*idjmā'*).

Between the eighth and the ninth centuries, a number of eminent scholars codified the whole of the Islamic law into a coherent system. Their individual approaches to this enormous task differed and the outcome was the emergence of four legal schools (*madhhab*, pl., *madhāhib*) named after their founders, who bear also the honorific title of *Imām*.

These four *madhāhib* are the Hanafi, Māliki, *Shāfi'i* and Hanbali schools. All of them are completely orthodox (Sunnite) and differ mainly on points of detail; it is not proper to call these schools sects.

Although there were various shifts in the course of history, each of these schools is now adhered to in specific geographical areas: the Hanafite school is dominant in those regions that came under the sway of the Turkish dynasties, i.e. Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Central Asia and northern India/Pakistan; the *Shāfi'ite madhhab* is to be found mostly along the shores of the Indian Ocean, from southern Arabia and East Africa to Indonesia, while Mālikism took root at a very early date in North Africa, Muslim Spain and western and central Sudan. The last school, the Hanbali, which used to be largely followed in Syria and Iraq, is now virtually confined to Saudi Arabia.

One of the central features of Islamic law is the assessing of all human acts and relationships from the standpoint of the following concepts: obligatory (*wādjib*), recommended (*mandūb*), indifferent (*mubāh*), reprehensible or disapproved (*makrūh*) and forbidden (*maḥḥūr*).

One feature that distinguishes *fiqh* from other legal systems is that it was created and developed by private legal experts. The state did not play the part of legislator, it did not decree the laws and, for a long time, there were no official codes of law issued by state organs. Instead, the laws were incorporated into scholarly manuals which had the force of law and served as references in actual juridical decisions.

The religious structure of Islam is such that it never produced any form of external organization or any kind of hierarchy. There is no priesthood and no church. Everybody is his own priest and there is no intermediary between the believer and God. Although it recognized *idjmā'*, the consensus of doctors of law, as a valid source of doctrine, there was neither a council nor a curia to promulgate its decisions.

It so happened, however, that the '*ulamā'*', in their quest for establishing Islamic precepts for every minute detail of worship and everyday life, were too absorbed in the formal aspect of the divine law and did not leave enough room for individual devotion. As a result, a reaction against intellectualism and formalism emerged in the form of Islamic mysticism, *sufism*.² Many famous mystics before the twelfth century

2. From Arabic *sūf*, wool, to denote the practice of wearing a woollen robe. Sufism is called *taṣawwuf* in Arabic.

made a positive contribution to the intensification of the Islamic faith. On the other hand, some adherents of sufism were prone to neglect religious obligations of the *sharī'a*, since they regarded themselves as being absolved of the duties of every Muslim. In the eleventh century, the great theologian al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) succeeded in incorporating sufism into orthodoxy by stressing the need for a personal approach to God and the duty to follow the prescripts of *sharī'a* as both being inseparable parts of Muslim religious life. Shortly afterwards, the *ṣūfīs* began to organize themselves into mystical associations or brotherhoods (Arabic, *ṭuruk*, sing., *ṭarīka*) around different spiritual leaders known as *shaykhs*. With time the number of the *ṭarīkas* increased, so that nearly every Muslim belonged to one brotherhood or another.

These respectable and recognized brotherhoods have to be distinguished from the cult of saints, who are known as *marabouts* in the Maghrib. Many of these *marabouts* exploited native Muslims by pretending to perform miracles and preparing various amulets and talismans, and by claiming to have direct access to God and thus to be able to intercede for others. From the point of view of authentic Islam, the cult of 'saints' is the product of a parasitical excrescence.

The Islamic sects

The origin of the main divisions into sects was political and it was only later that it became a matter of doctrinal divisions.

The chief problem on which the opinions of early Muslims centred was that of the succession of Muḥammad, not as a Prophet but as the head of the Islamic community. During his lifetime, the Prophet stated on several occasions that the one valid system for governing the community was *shurā* or consultation, what is now known as democracy. After his death, his immediate successors were elected and began to be appointed Caliphs. The first four Caliphs, called by Muslims *al-khulafā' al-rashīdūn* (the rightly guided Caliphs) were Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī; all of them belonged to the *Quraysh* tribe and were related to Muḥammad by marriage, while 'Alī was also his cousin. When the third Caliph, 'Uthmān, was murdered by a rebel group of Muslims who had been offended by some of his policies, and 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib was elected in Medina, his appointment was not accepted by some Companions, notably by Mu'āwiya, Governor of Syria. The outcome was civil strife between the followers of 'Alī and those of Mu'āwiya. When Caliph 'Alī agreed to the setting up of an arbitration commission consisting of two members, one representing himself and the other Mu'āwiya, many of his followers rejected this solution and expressed their disapproval by seceding from him; hence their name *Khāridjites* (from Arabic *khāradja* – to go out). During the seventh and eighth centuries, the *Khāridjites* revolted again and again against the Caliphs and the central government, mostly in Iraq, Arabia, Iran and adjoining countries. At a very early stage, the *Khāridjites* split into a large number of sects which differed in both theory and practice. They insisted on the importance of acts, not only of faith, and asserted that anyone guilty of grave sin was an unbeliever. By contrast with other Muslims who considered the *Imāmate* (or Caliphate) as being the prerogative of only certain lineages (either the *Qurayshites* in general or specifically the family of 'Alī), the *Khāridjites* insisted that anyone could be elected as

the head of the Muslim community if he possessed the necessary qualifications of piety, integrity and religious knowledge. These democratic tendencies attracted many people who were dissatisfied with the government for one reason or another. In the Maghrib, some of the Khāridjite sects – the Ibādites, the Nukkārītes and the Şufrītes – found a fertile soil for their doctrines among many Berbers who were dissatisfied with the oppressive Umayyad regime.³

Those who stayed with 'Alī were called Shī'atu 'Alī, i.e. the party of 'Alī, whence their name Shī'ites in the European languages. Unlike the Khāridjites, who differed from orthodox Islam on political and ethical issues only, the Shī'ites went further and added many new doctrines that were purely religious in content. They rejected the principle of consensus of the community and replaced it by the doctrine that there was in every age an infallible *Imām* to whom alone God entrusted the guidance of mankind. The first *Imām* was 'Alī and all following ones his direct descendants. The *Imāms* are considered to be divinely appointed rulers and teachers of the faithful and thus they have the sole right of leading the Muslim community; the Shī'ites believe that, even after the last *Imām* has 'disappeared' from the world, he continues his guidance as the 'hidden *Imām*'. He will reappear one day to restore peace and justice to the world as the *Mahdī* (the divinely guided one).

Shī'ism very soon split into a number of sects, the main difference between them arising from the question of who should be the 'hidden *Imām*'. The most important in the course of history became the group called the Twelvers (*Ithnā' ashariyya*), which recognizes the twelfth descendant of 'Alī, Muḥammad al-Mahdī, who disappeared in 880. The stronghold of the Twelvers today is Iran, where this brand of Shī'ism has been the state religion since the sixteenth century. Large groups of Shī'ites are also found in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and India.

Those Shī'ites who recognized the seventh *imām*, Ismā'īl, dissociated themselves from the main body and became known as Ismā'īliyya or the Seveners (*Sab'iyyūna*). The Ismā'īliyya functioned for a long time as a secret society, but they came out into the open with the emergence of the Fātimids, who were the most successful of all the Shī'ite branches and founded an empire which stretched from the Atlantic to Syria and Hidjāz.⁴

From the struggle among the Muslims, orthodoxy at last emerged victorious in the shape of Sunnism, the adherents of the *Sunna*, i.e. the way of the Prophet. They comprise today more than 90% of the world's Muslim population. The doctrinal differences between Sunnite and Shī'ite Islam are as follows: the sources of Sunnite laws are the Qoran, the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, the consensus of the community and analogy, whereas the four bases of Shī'ite law are the Qoran, the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet and the *Imāms*, the consensus of the *Imāms*, and reason.

Nevertheless, one of the original Shī'ite concepts, namely belief in the coming of the *Mahdī*, penetrated into Sunnite Islam, not as an official teaching as in Shī'ism but on the level of popular religion, where the *Mahdī* is the Messiah who will return to the earth, slay the anti-Christ and fill the world with justice, since it was before full

3. See Chapters 3 and 9–12 of this volume.

4. See Chapter 12 of this volume.

of injustice and tyranny. Through the centuries, *Mahdīs* appeared in various Muslim countries from time to time, the most famous examples being those of the Sudanese *Mahdī* Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdallāh and the Somali Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdille.

Islamic attitudes towards non-Muslims

Islam makes a sharp distinction between those non-Muslims who belong to a religious system with revealed Books, i.e. the *ahl al-Kitāb* ('People of the Book'), and non-Muslims regarded as polytheists, idolaters or pagans. The Jews and the Christians as possessors of the Holy Books are not forced to adopt Islam and this tolerance was also applied to Zoroastrians and later even to Hindus (notwithstanding their multitude of gods) and Buddhists.

In the case of the second group, since the Prophet Muḥammad was sent to preach Islam particularly to those who had not yet received any revealed guidance, he and his successors were obliged to combat paganism and to convert the 'infidels'. These were given the choice of either becoming Muslims or fighting; if they were defeated, their lot was captivity and slavery.

There are many erroneous conceptions about the *djihād*. This word is usually, but wrongly, translated as 'holy war', but there is nothing to that effect in the term, which really means 'striving to the utmost of one's ability' and hence, by extension, struggling for the inner perfection of the self.

The *djihād* as a warlike activity was considered by the legal schools (with the exception of the Hanbalites) as being an obligation if certain conditions were fulfilled, such as the fact that the unbelievers should be the first to commence hostilities and that there should be a reasonable hope of success. In special situations, the *djihād* becomes an individual duty incumbent even on slaves, women and minors, as in the event of the enemy attacking Muslim territory.

The wars of expansion of the Islamic state after the death of the Prophet were not aimed at the conversion of the conquered peoples since the majority of these adhered to religions with revealed scriptures, such as the Christians, Zoroastrians and Jews. They were obliged to pay the poll-tax (*ḍjizya*) and then became protected (*dhimmī*), without being forced to abandon their religion. The essential aim was the expansion of the Islamic state as the sphere within which the *sharī'a* was paramount. This came to be expressed in the distinction between *Dār al-Islām* and *Dār al-ḥarb*, the sphere of Islam and the sphere of war. The *Dār al-Islām*, or the Islamic *oekoumene*, does not mean that all its inhabitants must be Muslims, but rather that it is the part of the world where Islamic social and political order is predominant and Islamic public worship is observed. The *Dār-al-ḥarb* is the converse of the *Dār al-Islām*, in that it designates the rest of the world which is not yet under Islamic rule; in theory, this will one day disappear and become integrated into the Islamic *oekoumene*.

Nevertheless, from the ninth century onwards, when the universal Caliphate broke up into smaller states, a relationship of mutual tolerance was established between the Muslim world and the *Dār al-ḥarb*. Political and commercial relations with the European, Asiatic and African states were governed by the recognition of some of them as belonging to an intermediate category known as *Dār-al-sulḥ*, the sphere of truce. This

provided the main legal basis for peaceful contacts and communication with non-Muslim states.

Islamic expansion and the rise and fall of the Caliphate

Under the first four Caliphs, Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī,⁵ the Muslim Arabs started their expansion outside the Arabian peninsula. In the space of a few years, the nomadic Arab tribes, led by a Pleiad of brilliant generals of Meccan origin, won victories over the armies of the two great powers, the Byzantine empire and Sassanid Persia. The campaign against the Byzantines in Syria took only two years before the Emperor and his troops evacuated these provinces for ever in 636. The conquest of Persia lasted longer but, after some initial setbacks, the Arabs went from victory to victory. The battle of Kādisiyya and the occupation of the capital, Ktesiphon, in 637 opened up all the fertile lowlands of Iraq west of the Tigris to the Arabs. The Muslim armies then penetrated into the Iranian highlands in pursuit of the retreating Persian armies. The last great battle at Nihāwend (642) sealed the fate of the Sassanid empire. After occupying other parts of Iran, the Arabs pushed their advance to the east so that, by 650, they had reached the borders of India, northern Iraq and Armenia and the *Amu-Darja* (Oxus).

From Syria, the Arab armies turned to Egypt, which offered an even easier field of the conquest. Between 639 and 642, the whole of Lower Egypt with its capital, Alexandria, fell to the invading forces and Byzantium thus lost another rich province. This served later as the starting-point for further Arab advance in North Africa.⁶

One of the principal reasons for the lightning successes of the Muslims was the financial and military exhaustion of both empires after their long series of wars. In addition, the Byzantines were hated by their Semitic and Coptic subjects because of their oppressive taxation and their persecution of the 'heretic' Monophysite churches. The situation in the Sassanid empire was somewhat similar, in that the most fertile province of Iraq was inhabited by the Christian Aramaic-speaking peoples, who stood in opposition to the Zoroastrian ruling classes. In general, in most of the conquered countries the local inhabitants offered no resistance to the invading Arabs, since they had little or nothing to lose by the change of masters; in some cases the Muslims were even welcomed.

The civil war between 'Alī and Mu'awīya after the death of 'Uthmān, which ended with the coming of the Umayyad dynasty to power in 661, halted the external expansion of the Arab state for some years. But already in the reign of Mu'awīya the frontiers were expanded in North Africa by 'Uqba ibn Nāfi', while in the east the entire province of K̄hurāsān (north-eastern Iran and Afghanistan) was conquered and the River Oxus crossed (between 663 and 674).

A second wave of conquests on all fronts was launched under the Caliphs 'Abd al-Malik (685–705) and al-Walid I (705–715): in the west, the whole of the Maghrib was subjugated and Spain invaded, while, in the east, Transoxania was conquered and

5. Abū Bakr, 632–634; 'Umar, 634–644; 'Uthmān, 644–656; 'Alī, 656–661.

6. See Chapters 7, 8 and 9 of this volume.

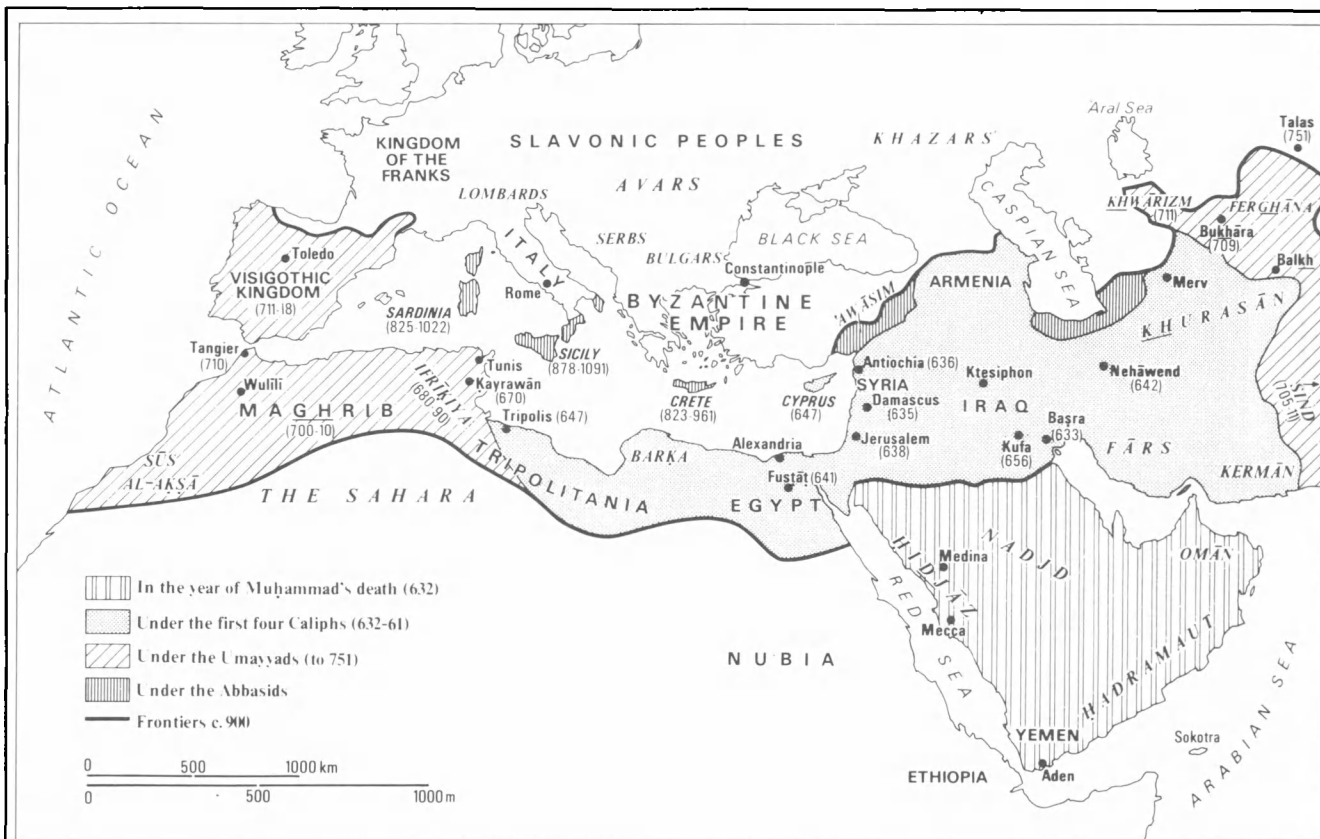
at the same time the Arab armies pushed as far as the River Indus, adding the new province of Sind to the Caliphate. Further advance in the west was stopped by the Franks, while attempts to advance north of the Caucasus were frustrated by the Turkish Khazars. For a long time, therefore, the Pyrenees and the Caucasus marked the limits of the Arab empire.

Thus, one hundred years after the Prophet's death, the Arab state already covered an enormous territory, which was to become the core of the Islamic world. The Arabs were its undisputed masters and formed the exclusive ruling class. The Umayyad policy was to perpetuate this situation, in which all non-Muslims had to pay taxes, whereas the Muslim Arabs were exonerated and were even paid pensions from the tax revenues. The Arab ruling class, therefore, did not look with favour on the mass conversions in the conquered lands, and the new Muslims, who had to attach themselves to one of the Arab tribes as clients (*mawālī*), still had to pay taxes. By contrast, the conquered peoples, regardless of whether they were Persians, Copts or Aramaeans (in Syria and Iraq), were increasingly employed in the ever more complex state administration. The contradictions arising from the fact that a minority usurped all the political power and enjoyed all the economic privileges, while the majority – although already Muslim – was denied access to them, were the main causes of the crisis which ended with the fall of the Umayyads and the coming of a new dynasty, the Abbasids. The victory of the latter was made possible with the support of all the dissatisfied elements, chiefly composed of non-Arab Muslims, who claimed their full share in a community founded on the principle of equality among all believers. The Abbasid revolution put an end to the 'Arab kingdom' – as the Umayyad period is sometimes called – and inaugurated the Islamic empire, where the distinction was along religious, rather than national, lines. Although the Arabs lost their privileged status, Arabic continued to be the language of the state, and of literature and science, and was widely used by peoples of other than Arab origin.

Under the Umayyads, the centre of the empire was Syria with its capital in Damascus; although the eastern provinces were in no way neglected, most attention was naturally focused on the Mediterranean world of Egypt, North Africa and Spain.

The transfer of the capital from Syria to Iraq, where the Abbasids founded Baghdad (in 762), not only involved a geographical shift of the centre of gravity of the empire, but was also an act symbolizing the beginning of a new era. By contrast with the Umayyad emphasis on Arabism, their successors laid stress on Islam as the basis of their regime and the promotion of orthodox Islam became one of the chief tasks of the caliphal administration.

During the first century of Abbasid rule, the territory of the Caliphate was still extended, although on a less grandiose scale than before: the Caspian provinces were annexed and, in 827, the dependent dynasty of the Aghlabids began to conquer Sicily. On the other hand, the Abbasid realm had been much smaller than that of the Umayyads right from the start, since Muslim Spain had never belonged to it, a descendant of the Umayyad family having already founded, in 756, a totally independent dynasty that was to reign there for two-and-a-half centuries. In the course of the first fifty years of their rule, the Abbasids lost control of all African provinces west of Egypt either to the Khāridjites or the Idrīsids; in 800, the governor of Ifrikiya, al-Aghlab,



2.2 The expansion of the Islamic state. (I. Hrbek)

became virtually independent and founded his own dynasty.⁷

The causes of the gradual disintegration of great empires in former times are well known. They are bound up with the inability, with the means of communication then available, to effectively ensure control, from a single centre, over an enormous realm composed of countries with differing populations, and with the tendency of provincial governors to break away from the central government.

Until the second half of the ninth century, however, a succession of remarkably efficient caliphs was able to maintain effective rule and control. But, after the Zandj revolt⁸, the inevitable process of disintegration gained momentum as various local dynasties emerged in Iran and Central Asia, as well as in Arabia and Syria. During the tenth century, even the core of the Abbasid realm, Iraq, fell under the sway of the Shī'ite dynasty of the Buwayhids, who made the Abbasid caliphs their puppets. In the west, the Fātimids founded a rival caliphate and began to put into effect their grandiose plans for domination over the entire Islamic world. They did not succeed entirely, but managed to detach Egypt, Syria and Arabia from the Abbasid territory. Moreover, since, in 929, the Spanish Umayyad 'Abd al-Raḥmān III took the caliphal title of the 'Prince of the Believers' (*amīr al-mu'miṇīn*), there were, for some time, three caliphs in Islam. A new era was opened in the mid-eleventh century, when the Turkish Saldjuks, who adhered to Sunnite Islam, liberated the Abbasids from the yoke of the Buwayhids.

The Central Asiatic Turks had been a dominating factor in the Muslim Near Eastern countries since the ninth century; the armies of the Muslim states were composed largely of Turkish cavalry and Turkish generals (*amīrs*) soon assumed the role of kingmakers. The novelty of the Saldjuk invasion was that a whole Turkish people was now on the move to conquer most of western Asia for themselves. This move ushered in the era of Turkish pre-eminence in the political and military history of large parts of the Islamic world. The Turks continued to expand Islam in various directions; the Ghaznavids of Afghanistan launched the military conquest of India and other dynasties followed in their steps, so that the mightiest of them, the Great Mughals, who came to power in the sixteenth century, could claim that the greater part of India belonged to *Dār al-Islām*.

The Saldjuks themselves added to the Islamic world many new territories in eastern and central Asia Minor, the great bastion of the Byzantine Christian empire. The crowning point of the new Turkish Muslim offensive came with the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by the Ottoman sultan Meḥmed II Fatīḥ.

In terms of the development of Islamic religious thought, the Abbasid period represents a formative period for various branches of the religious sciences, particularly of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and speculative theology (*kalam*).

A fundamental place in the birth and development of Muslim thought is held by the *Mu'tazila*. This is the name given to an early school of Muslim religious thinkers who, under the influence of Greek philosophy, wished to place the resources of reason at the service of Islam. In European literature, the *Mu'tazilites* are sometimes called

7. See Chapter 10 of this volume.

8. See Chapters 1 and 26.

'free-thinkers' or 'liberals', but those labels are misleading. The *Mu'tazila* was not a sect and its adherents included Sunnites and Shī'ites alike; their aim was to present the dogmas of Islam as being acceptable not only to faith but also to reason. The *Mu'tazilites* insisted on the unity and oneness of God and even rejected the real attributes of God and all forms of anthropomorphism. They held the opinion that the Qoran was not eternal but had been created in time. Their last great theme derived from the Islamic tenet concerning divine justice. The *Mu'tazila* found it difficult to reconcile the doctrine of predestination with the goodness of God; it was abhorrent to them to think that man would be punished for deeds which God had commanded him to perform. For some time in the first half of the ninth century, the *Mu'tazilite* doctrine was elevated to the status of the Abbasid state religion, during which time the *Mu'tazilites* displayed a violently intolerant attitude and forcibly insisted on having their own ideas generally accepted. After a brief period of domination, however, they were in turn persecuted and suppressed. Even so, in spite of the rejection of its main doctrines, the *Mu'tazila* was indirectly responsible for the definitive formulation of the beliefs of 'those who are faithful to the tradition of the Prophet' (*ahl al-sunna*) by such eminent theologians as al-Ash'arī (d. 935) and al-Bāḳillānī (d. 1013).

These Sunnite theologians lived and worked at a time when the prospects of Sunni Islām and of the Abbasid Caliphate were at their lowest ebb. The schismatic Fāṭimids reigned over half of the Islamic world and were an ideological and political threat to the rest. The Shī'ā was flourishing even within the Abbasid domain, where the Buwayhids had made the Caliphs their puppets. Petty Shī'ite dynasties ruled in parts of Arabia and in Syria and northern Iran.

The coming of the Saldjuks did more than restore the territorial unity of Islam; it was accompanied by a great religious revival of Sunni orthodoxy. It is interesting to note that this revival of orthodoxy and the reaction against heterodoxies started almost simultaneously in the east (the Saldjuks) and the west (the Almoravids); in both cases, the bearers of orthodoxy were recently converted nomadic peoples from the fringes of the Islamic world. The religious zeal and military prowess of the Turks and Berbers also found expression in the renewal of the struggle on the frontiers with the Christians, in both Anatolia and Spain.

Conclusion

The end of the eleventh century was thus marked in the Islamic world by significant changes at many levels. In political terms, it heralded the definitive hegemony of the Turks in the eastern parts and of the Berbers in the west. The Saldjuk offensive against the Byzantines in Asia Minor provoked a reaction in Western Europe in the form of the First Crusade. Although the territorial gains of the Franks, as the Crusaders were called in Muslim countries, were not excessively large, the implantation of the Christians in the Holy Land and on the Mediterranean shores of Asia introduced a new political factor into the Near Eastern scene.

In Muslim Spain, the occupation of Toledo in 1085 and the ensuing Christian offensive against the Muslim *mulūk al-ṭawā'if* threatened the existence of Islam on the Iberian peninsula for the first time. The danger was averted for a time by the

intervention of the Berber Almoravids, but in the central Mediterranean the Muslims lost Sicily for ever.

No less important were the changes in economy and trade. With the arrival of the Saldjuks, the institution of *ikṭā* – a kind of military fief-holding – became a characteristic feature of the economic life and socio-political structure in large parts of the Muslim world. In spite of differing interpretations placed on this institution, it is clear that it represented a production system corresponding typologically to European feudalism.

The period of the tenth and eleventh centuries also saw a gradual shift of the terminal point of the Indian Ocean trade from the Arab/Persian Gulf to the Red Sea and hence into the Fāṭimid orbit. Egypt profited most by this change and was, for a long time to come, the main centre of the transit trade between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean.

Two measures contributed significantly to the victory of Sunnite Islam at this time. The first one was the establishment of *madrasas* or higher religious institutions for the education of '*ulamā*'. The *madrasa* was founded as a counter-weight to similar institutions in Fāṭimid Egypt and as a more effective means of combating the organized dissemination of Ismā'īli propaganda. Indeed, the *madrasa* was rightly called 'the bulwark of orthodoxy'. The second contributory factor was the recognition and incorporation of Sufism into the fold of official Islam and the emergence of Ṣufī brotherhoods; '*ulamā*' became members and were thus able to steer both its leaders and members towards orthodoxy and away from heterodoxy. Orthodox Sufism, as practised by recognized *tañka*, also stressed moral perfection, preached personal effort (the greater *djihād*) as an indispensable basis for Muslim social values, and insisted on charitable acts and self-denial.

3

Stages in the development of Islam and its dissemination in Africa

Introduction

Islam – together with Buddhism and Christianity – belongs in the category of missionary religions, i.e. those in which the spreading of the truth and the conversion of ‘unbelievers’ were considered a duty by the founder and by the whole community.

During Muḥammad’s life, Islam became the religion of the Arabs; it fell to the first Caliphs to carry it beyond the borders of the Arabian peninsula. There the Muslims encountered a different situation: whereas the majority of the Arabs had, before their conversion, been pagan (Arabic *mushrikūn*, polytheists), the surrounding countries were inhabited by Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians, who, according to the Islamic view, were *ahl al-kitāb*, people of the Book, i.e. of revealed scriptures, and thus adherents of a revealed, even if imperfect, monotheistic religious system. The Muslims were under no obligation to either convert or exterminate them, since Islam discourages compulsory conversion. During the great Arab conquest, there was certainly no attempt to convert the *ahl al-kitāb* by force.

Although generations of scholars have already clearly demonstrated that the image of the Muslim Arab warrior, with sword in one hand and the Qoran in the other, belongs to the realm of mythology, this image still persists in popular writings on Islam and is generally believed in non-Muslim countries. However, the conquests during the first century of the *hidjra* were made not for the sake of conversions alone but actually for the extension of the Islamic sphere of domination (*dār al-Islām*), since the Muslims were interested more in the incorporation of unbelievers into the Islamic state, which in their eyes represented the ultimate realization of a divinely ordered plan for mankind, than in their immediate conversion.

The *ahl al-kitāb* were allowed a broad measure of autonomy in all ecclesiastic matters under condition of payment of *djizya*, the poll-tax. Muslims were exempted from this tax and Muslim Arab warriors and their families were paid pensions from the central state treasury (*dīwān*), as well as enjoying a privileged social position. The obvious advantages of belonging to the faith of the victors were not lost on the conquered peoples and many of them went over to Islam.

It was not until the second and third centuries after the *hidjra* that the bulk of the Near Eastern peoples started to profess Islam. The motives which led to their conversion were manifold: some were attracted by the simple and straightforward

teachings of Islam, while others wanted to escape tribute and taxes, and still others sought to identify themselves with the ruling class and participate fully in the emerging Islamic culture.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that the Arab conquest resulted – not immediately but in the long run – in the Islamization of the majority of the Near Eastern and North African populations. The rule of the Muslim Arabs was such that it created political, religious, social and cultural conditions that favoured conversion to the religion of the politically dominant group without the need to resort to force.

The Islamization of North Africa

Egypt

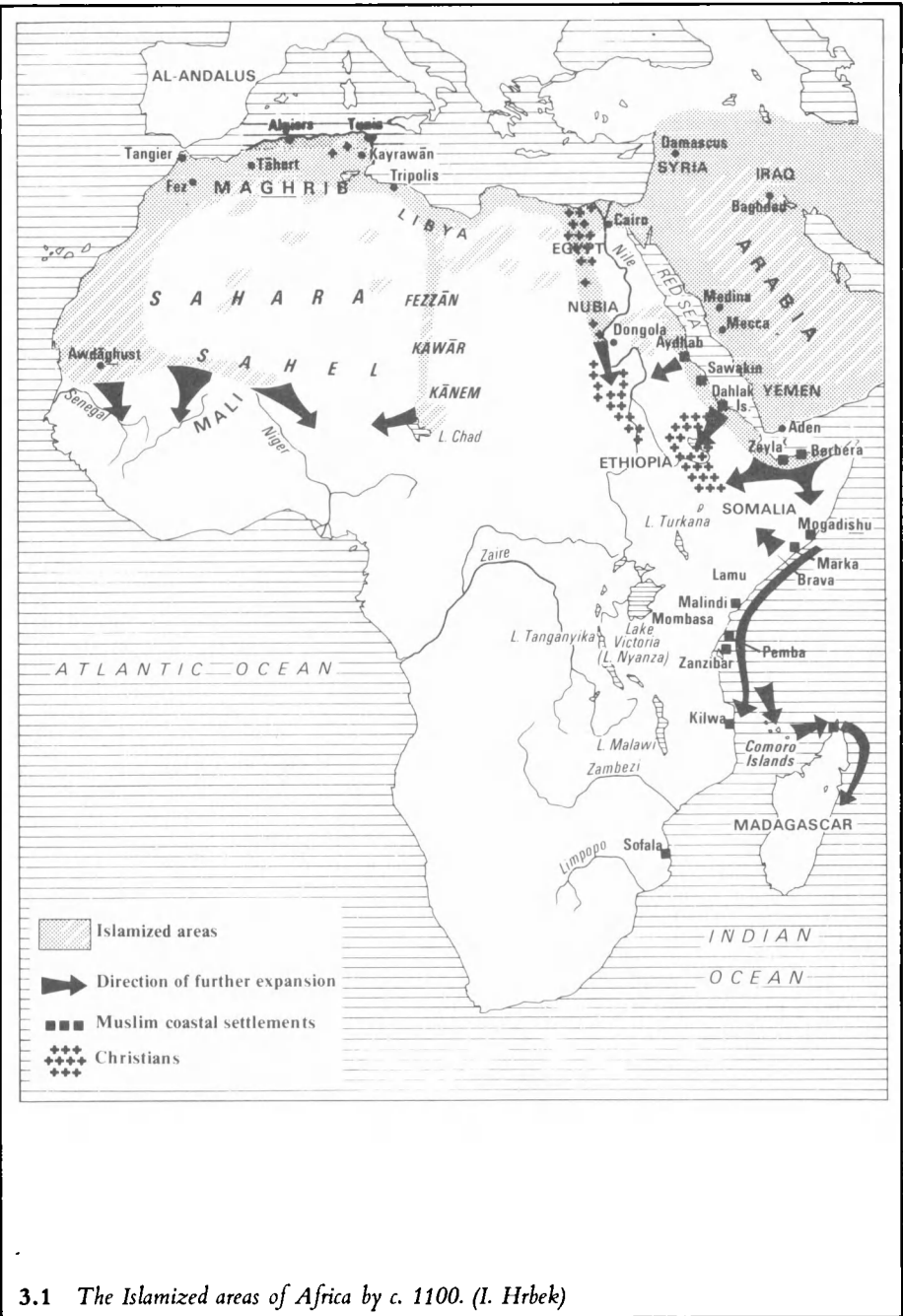
Egypt was the first African country invaded by the Arabs. The Copts did not offer any resistance but, on the contrary, welcomed the Arabs as their deliverers from the Byzantine yoke. They had suffered not only from a heavy tax burden and other forms of exploitation but also from the religious persecution to which they were subjected as Monophysites by the official Byzantine Orthodox Church.¹

This struggle between the two Christian churches in Egypt facilitated, to some degree, the early conversions of Egyptians to Islam. The interminable theological controversies of a most abstruse and metaphysical character must have been unintelligible to the vast majority of Christians, and hence many of them welcomed a faith that offered them a simple and clear truth about one God and his Prophet. This helps to explain the rapid spread of Islam in the early days of the Arab occupation. Although, in later periods, the Copts were persecuted from time to time by intolerant rulers and many of them were thereby driven to abandon their faith, such cases were the exception rather than the rule. Paradoxically, it was under the Fātimids and Ayyubids – both of them dynasties that were regarded as champions of Islam – that the non-Muslim subjects enjoyed a freedom of religion rarely seen in earlier or later periods. By bringing Muslims and Christians together, this tolerance led to the gradual disappearance of the Coptic language from everyday use and to its replacement by Arabic. The Copts filled many posts in the state apparatus, collected taxes and discharged financial and administrative responsibilities; numerous other Christians (Armenians) and Jews were similarly employed.

The Islamization and Arabization of Egypt was also furthered by the steady influx of Arab Bedouins, who settled down as peasants and mixed with the Copts, and thereby increased the number of Arabic-speakers and Muslims. Another factor leading to conversions was the increasing corruption and degeneracy of the Coptic clergy from the eleventh century onwards, with the result that the spiritual and moral needs of the people were neglected.

The Islamization of Egypt was thus a rather complicated process, in which many factors – sincere religious adherence, fiscal and social advantages, persecutions, the decay of the Coptic Church, the influx of Muslims from abroad – all played their part.

1. See Chapter 7 of this volume.



3.1 The Islamized areas of Africa by c. 1100. (I. Hrbek)

The combined outcome meant that Egypt in the Mamluk period was already a country with a Muslim majority and Coptic and Jewish minorities.

The Maghrib

The religious situation in North Africa was more complex than that found in Egypt. The Romanized population in the towns and on the coastal plains adhered to Christianity, whereas the Berbers in the interior remained largely pagan and some of the mountain inhabitants had adopted Judaism.

The information we possess about the early spread of Islam in the Maghrib is rather meagre. Furthermore, the beginnings of Islamization are coloured in later Arabic sources by the 'Ukba legend, in which that gallant warrior was transformed into a peaceful missionary. It is nevertheless a fact that, with the foundation of *Ḳayrawān* in the year 670, he created not only a military base but also an important centre for propagating the message of Islam and extending its influence.²

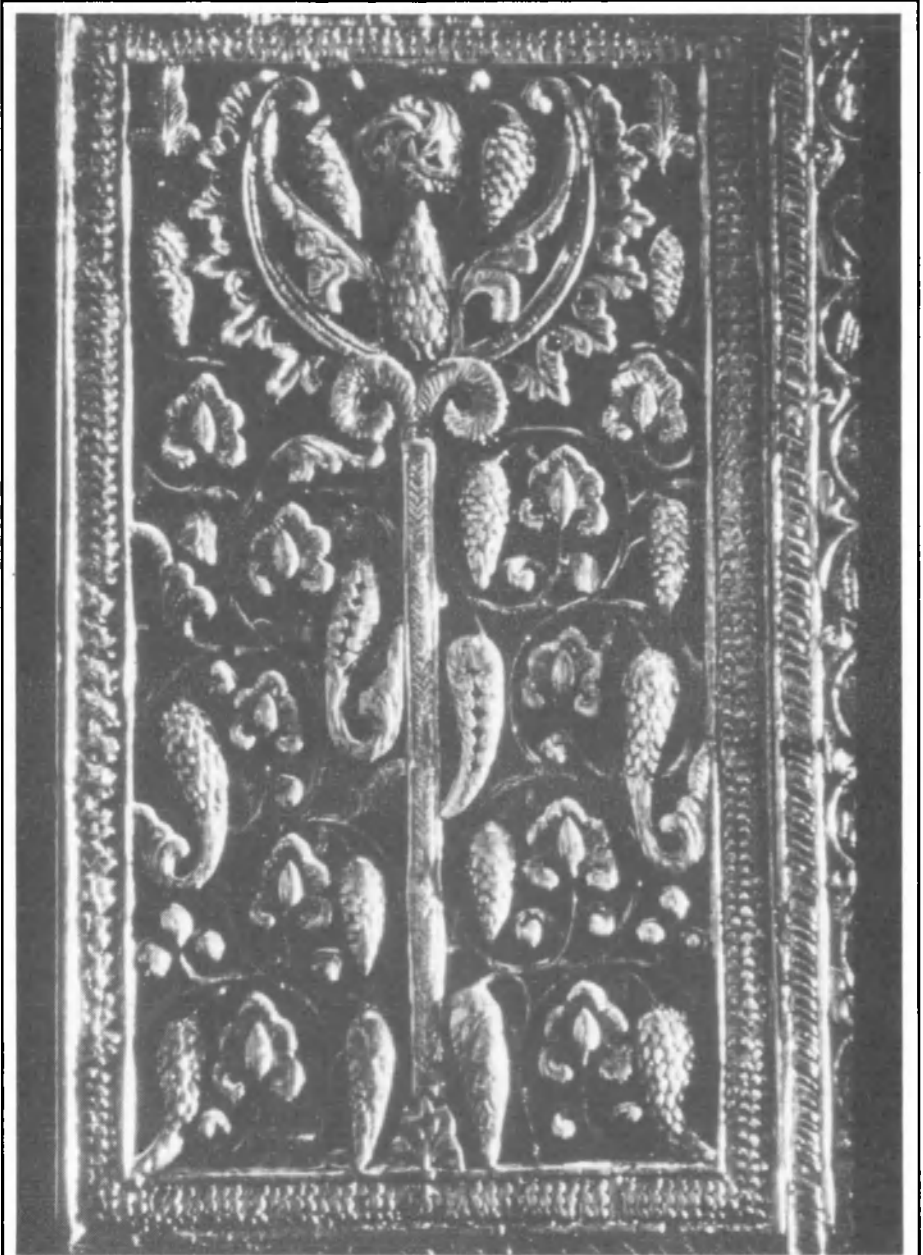
Although Arab domination in *Ifrikiya* was more stable than in the rest of the Maghrib, even here the process of Islamization went rather slowly. In many regions, Romanized and Christian Africans continued to represent the majority of the population during the first two centuries after the conquest. In more remote parts, but also in some towns like Carthage and Tunis, small Christian enclaves were still found in later centuries, as in the cases of *Mzāb* in the eleventh century, *Ḳafsa* in the twelfth century and some *Nafzāwa* villages in the fourteenth century. In the town of *Tozeur*, the ancient Christian population persisted until the eighteenth century. This long survival of the native Christians militates against the supposition that there were forced conversions: in fact, the general social conditions were instrumental in leading to the gradual change of religion. As in other parts of the Islamic world, the spread of Islam was more rapid among townspeople than in the countryside.

Although it is not possible to give a precise answer as to why and how individual Berber groups adopted Islam, some general trends characterizing the successive stages of this process can at least be discerned.

In the first stage, many Berber groups, after putting up fierce resistance to the Arab armies, were subdued and converted. Conversion under these circumstances was largely a matter of form and was probably restricted to chiefs and clan elders, who thereby recognized the sovereignty of the new masters. As soon as the Arab armies withdrew or were expelled – and this happened many times during the seventh century – the Berbers reverted to their traditional beliefs. This prompted *Ibn Ḳhaldūn* to make his famous remark that the Berbers apostasized as many as a dozen times during the first seventy years of their contact with Islam.

The Arabs then changed their policies: they started to select young men of noble origin from among the prisoners, liberate them under condition of their embracing Islam, and then appoint them to high commands in the army. This policy soon bore fruit as many Berber warriors, encouraged by the example of their chiefs, joined the Arab armies. Moreover, the successful invasion of Spain brought to the Muslim side

2. See Chapter 9 of this volume.



3.2 *Detail of a minbar (in carved cedar) from the mosque of Ḳayrawān. (Photo: copyright Bernard Nantet, Paris)*

large numbers of Berbers eager to participate in the conquest and share in the booty. Thus, shortly after the crushing of the last great upsurge of resistance against the Arabs and Islam, thousands of Berbers joined both the armies and the faith of their erstwhile enemies. However, these conversions affected only a part of the population and it took a long time before Islam penetrated into the mountain areas.

During the first half of the eighth century, Islam made great progress among the urban and rural population and even among some of the nomads in the plains and coastal strips. It was precisely at this time that the peculiar Berber attitude towards the Arabs and Islam began to manifest itself: the Berbers were ready to accept Islam as a religion and even Arabic culture – and they did so on a massive scale – but at the same time they resented being politically dominated by a foreign bureaucracy, representing a faraway sovereign, which discriminated against new converts.

Thus the stage was set for the next phase: the Berbers transposed their struggle against foreign domination on to an ideological level within the Islamic context. In protest against the oppression of the orthodox Arabs, they started to adhere to the doctrines of *Khāridjism*. *Khāridjite* political and religious teaching was democratic, puritanical and fundamentalist, and in all these respects they were radically opposed to the orthodox and absolutist Caliphate.³ This teaching fell on fertile ground among the Berbers, many of whom enthusiastically adopted it as the ideology of their struggle against Arab domination. The principle of the equality of all believers was in keeping with both their social structure and their ideals. Equally attractive to them was the teaching that, since all Muslims are equal, luxurious living and ostentation by some is sinful and that true believers should live soberly and modestly. This puritanical element must have had a profound influence on the frugal Berber peasants and seminomads, scandalized as they were by the luxury and easy morals of the Arab ruling classes.

The *Khāridjite* doctrine spread chiefly among the Berber population in the area of steppes stretching from Tripolitania in the east through southern Ifrīqiya to southern Morocco in the west, and primarily influenced the Berbers of the great *Zanāta* family.

It is quite plain that the adoption of the *Khāridjite* teaching by so many Berbers had its roots in their social and national opposition to the domination of Arab ruling classes. Berber *Khāridjism* was by no means an anti-Islamic movement, but rather an expression of Berber acceptance of Islam as a religion.

Similarly, the Berber resistance was not aimed against Muslim Arabs as such, but only against their ruling class. They vigorously opposed any forceful or arbitrary imposition of foreign rule or rulers, but were ready to accept non-Berber Muslims as their chiefs, as a matter of free choice. This happened in the case of the Persian Ibn Rustum in Tāhert, the 'Alid Idrīs in Morocco and the Fāṭimid 'Ubaydullāh among the *Kutāma* Berbers. In all these cases, these men were accepted not only as leaders of an anti-government opposition but also for their specific Islamic appeal.

There were also attempts to found an exclusive Berber religion as a counterpart to Islam, the most celebrated and long-lasting being that of the *Barghawāṭa*, a fraction

3. See Chapters 2 and 10 of this volume.

of the Maṣmūda, who lived on the Atlantic plain of Morocco between Sale and Sāfi.⁴

In other parts of Morocco, among the Awrāba, Miknāsa, Ghomāra and others, Islam had already made some progress in the course of the eighth century, but the real breakthrough and a more deep-rooted implantation appear to have taken place during the rule of the Idrīsīd dynasty. Its founder, Idrīs I, after being proclaimed Caliph (in 788), launched an offensive to bring those Berbers who had not yet been converted under the sway of Islam. This policy was continued by his son Idrīs II, so that, in the course of the next century, northern Morocco, with the exception of the 'heretical' Barghawāta, was to a large extent Islamized.

The Islamization of the whole of the Maghrib had generally been completed by the tenth century; only in some regions and towns were there still some small Christian and Jewish communities, while a few Berber groups in remote mountain areas still clung to their ancient beliefs and the 'heretical' Barghawāta were still unsubdued. In the mean time, however, the political and social conditions underwent many changes and these profoundly influenced the entire religious situation.

By sweeping away the Khāridjite states of Tahert and Sidjilmāsa and suppressing several Khāridjite revolts, the Fātimids dealt a mortal blow to Berber Khāridjism. They were, however, unable to attract the Berber masses to their form of Islam, Shī'ism, and these turned instead to Sunnite Islam and especially to the Mālikite *madhhab* (religious-legal school). The surviving Khāridjites either withdrew into remote regions such as the Mzāb and the Djabal Nafūsa, or gradually went over to Mālikism. Khāridjism ceased to be the specific Berber form of Islam because it was at this time that it lost its *raison d'être* as the expression of Berber opposition to foreign rule. There was no foreign domination in the Maghrib after the Fātimids transferred the centre of their empire to Egypt and left the Maghrib under the governorship of the Berber Zirīds. Shortly afterwards, the western part of the Maghrib came under the sway of the Berber Almoravids, who exterminated the last vestiges of Khāridjism, Shī'ism and the Barghawāta heresy in this area, and established the domination of the Mālikite school of Sunnite Islam once and for all.

The spread of Islam to the south of the Sahara

Since the Islamization of the northern part of Africa came about as a result of the Arab conquest, it is often thought that the spread of this religion into tropical Africa followed a similar pattern, i.e. that the local peoples were first subdued by the Arabs (or Berbers) and then forced to adopt Islam. External conquest by Muslim invaders, however, played a negligible role with the exception of the eastern Sudan, where extensive Arab settlement had been of crucial importance for the dissemination of Islam. Even here, however, the conversion of the autochthonous peoples followed much later. The conquest of African societies by Islamized states was a significant factor in the Chad region and in southern Ethiopia, but in various parts of Africa to the south of the Sahara the normal pattern by which Islam spread was quite different, as will be seen further below.

4. See Chapter 10 of this volume.

The Sahara

The Berbers of the western Sahara may have entered into contact with Islam either through the Arab warriors who had penetrated into their country from al-Sūs al-Akṣā or through the Muslim merchants, whose caravans had appeared on the western Sahara trade routes just after the Arab conquest of the Maghrib. These contacts certainly led to the conversion of some individual Berbers who served as caravan guides and escorts. In a few commercial and political centres along the routes where the Muslim traders had settled permanently, the influence of Muslim culture on the local population must have been stronger and more far-reaching.

The first of the Saharan Berbers whose conversion is attested seem to have been the Lamtūna, who are said to have accepted Islam in the second decade of the eighth century, followed shortly afterwards by the Massūfa and Djuddāla. Their Islam, however, must have been only a thin veneer for many centuries to come; the whole history of the beginning of the Almoravid movement furnishes eloquent evidence of the superficial Islamization among these three Berber peoples.⁵

The western and central Sudan

Islam had been carried across the desert to the western Sudan even before the Maghrib and the Sahara had themselves been fully converted. The Berbers of the town of Tādmekka were Islamized seven years after the people of Ghana, having been forced to do so by the newly converted Ghana. In this case, the 'conversion' had possibly meant enforced acceptance of the orthodox Almoravid Islam by those who already professed the Khāridjite faith. Tādmekka had been visited by Ibādī traders from North Africa since the ninth century and had become a centre of their missionary activities among the Sudanese peoples.

It is now quite clear that Ibādī traders penetrated the Sudan much earlier than orthodox Sunnites and it is likely that some of the first converts among the Sudanese were won for Islam precisely by the proselytizing efforts of the Ibādītes. Since the eighth century, the Ibādī merchants, who came from Tāhert, Wargla, southern Tunisia and Djabal Nafūsa, had settled in various Sudanese towns such as Ghana, Gao, Awdāghust, Tādmekka, Ghayārū, Zāfunu and Kūgha. Although reports on the missionary activities of these merchants are not numerous, it can be surmised that their long presence in the most important Sudanese centres exercised a religious influence on the local inhabitants. The first converts would have been, of course, their Sudanese partners in trade. On the other hand, no traces of the religious tenets of the Ibādīte faith have remained alive in the Sudanese belt. A more profound Ibādīte influence can seemingly only be detected in the religious architecture: the minaret forms extant in many parts of the Sudan came originally from southern Tunisia, whereas the rectangular minbars are copies of those from Mzāb, the main Ibādīte centre from the tenth century onwards.

The early Ibādīte influence in the southern Sahara and the western Sudan was eradicated under the impact of the Almoravids, who preached orthodox Islam and

5. See Chapter 13 of this volume.

ensured that the Sudanese Muslims thereafter adhered to Mālikism.

It is difficult to assess how effective or profound this first wave of Islamization had been. Having regard to the situation of Islam in more recent times, it can be generally surmised that this early Islam contained many elements of various pre-Islamic faiths known in the Maghrib since the end of the Roman epoch (Judaism, Christianity), as well as survivals from the Berber and African religions.

Nevertheless, the Ibādites had the undeniable merit of having been the first to introduce Islam to the Sudanese peoples; they laid the foundations on which later propagators of Islam were able to build a more enduring structure.

The association of Islam and trade in sub-Saharan Africa is a well-known fact. The commercially most active peoples, the Dyula, Hausa and Dyakhanke, were among the first to be converted when their respective countries came into contact with Muslims. The explanation of this phenomenon is to be found in social and economic factors. Islam as a religion born in the commercial society of Mecca and preached by a Prophet who himself had for a long time been a merchant, provides a set of ethical and practical precepts closely related to business activities. This moral code helped to sanction and control commercial relationships and offered a unifying ideology among the members of different ethnic groups, thus providing for security and credit, two of the chief requirements of long-distance trade.

Muslims in these early days tended to form small communities scattered along the main trade routes all over the Sahel and Sudan. In some capital cities, like Ghana or Gao, the merchants and Muslims – in fact, these categories were in most cases identical – lived in separate quarters and sometimes enjoyed a measure of political and judicial autonomy. These settlements along the trade routes and in the major centres constituted the nursery for the eventual propagation of Islam.

In the wake of the traders, the growth of Muslim communities led to the arrival of Muslim clerics, for whom religious activities were generally more important than commercial ones. At first, these performed a variety of clerical functions for established Muslim communities, to which they later added healing and divining, and the manufacture and sale of charms and amulets. This side of their activities constituted the major appeal of Islam in non-Muslim eyes in the Sudan countries. Interpretations of dreams, faith-healing, divining the future, and belief in the power of prayer, especially of prayers for rain, were all of great relevance.

The second social group – after the merchants – to be converted to Islam were the rulers and courtiers. It is generally acknowledged that the first ruler in the western Sudan to become Muslim was Wār Dyābī of Tākūr on the lower Senegal, who adopted Islam even before the rise of the Almoravids in the 1030s. He undertook to spread the new religion into the neighbouring country of Silla and, in 1056, his son Labī joined Yahyā ibn 'Umar in fighting the rebellious *Djuddāla*. In later centuries, in North Africa and in Egypt, the name of Tākūr tended to be synonymous with all the Muslim countries of the western and central Sudan. It is still not established whether this usage goes back to the fact that Tākūr was the first West African Muslim country or that, by the fourteenth century, the people of Tākūr had begun to produce their own class of Muslim clerics (the *Torodbe*), who were to play such an important role in the Islamization of the whole western Sudan.

An even earlier, also pre-Almoravid, conversion of a local ruler occurred in Gao (Kāw-Kāw) where, in about 1009–10, the fifteenth Dyā (Zā) ruler, Kosoy, adopted Islam. Al-Bakrī reports that when a new ruler was installed at Gao he was given a sword, a shield and a copy of the Qoran, which were said to have been sent from the Caliph as his insignia of office.

The conversion of the king of Mallal, one of the earlier chiefdoms of Malinke, also belongs to this same period. The ruler was won over to Islam by a Muslim resident whose prayers brought long-awaited rainfall to the country. Although the royal family and court became sincere Muslims, the rest of the people persisted in their traditional religion.

The first establishment of Islam in the central Sudan occurred in the eleventh century with the conversion of the *Mais* of Kānem, Ḥummay D̲jilmi (1080–97).⁶ Already under the reigns of some of Ḥummay's predecessors, there were Muslim clerics living at the court who even instructed the rulers in Islamic precepts and read parts of the Qoran with them; nevertheless, none of the *Mais* publicly professed Islam. However, the son and successor of Ḥummay, Dūnama (1097–1150), undertook two pilgrimages to Mecca and was drowned on his second visit.

The eleventh century seems to represent the period when there was the first real breakthrough by Islam in the western and central Sudan: from lower Senegal to the shores of Lake Chad, Islam was accepted by various rulers and chiefs, and thus gained official recognition in the framework of African societies. The same century also brought about the conversion of Ghana, the most famous and most powerful of the Sudanese states at the time.

It used to be thought that this conversion was the result of the Almoravid conquest of Ghana in 1076. However, recent research has cast serious doubts on this view and it is becoming increasingly accepted that no such conquest ever took place and that the two powers, in fact, maintained friendly relations throughout. It seems more likely that the Soninke of Ghana were on good terms with the desert Almoravids, that they became their allies rather than their enemies, and that they were peacefully persuaded by them to adopt Sunni Islam as the official religion of the Ghana empire. The rulers of Ghana were for a long time exposed to Islamic influences; it is also likely that Islam first came to Ghana in its *Khāridjite* form. The conversion of the people of Ghana by the Almoravids in 1076 could therefore mean that there was merely an imposition of orthodox Mālikite Islam on a previously Ibāḍite community, as had earlier been the case of Awdāghust. The most important achievement of the Almoravid intervention was doubtlessly the conversion of the king and his court.

Likewise rejected is the view that the conquest and enforced Islamization of Ghana led to a massive population movement of the Soninke, who opposed Islam and preferred to leave their ancestral home rather than abandon their traditional religious beliefs. Since no such conquest or enforced Islamization took place, the migration which did occur cannot be attributed to these factors.

It would be, of course, mistaken not to see the profound impact of the Almoravids and the changes their intervention brought to the Sudan. However, these changes

6. See Chapter 15 of this volume.

were of a quite different order from those supposed by the adherents of the migration theory. The Soninke really started to disperse, but this was a continuation of a process which had begun much earlier. The Islamized Soninke merchants – the Wangara of the Arabic sources – gradually established their commercial network in the Sahel and southwards, towards the fringes of the tropical forest. Far from being averse to Islam, on the contrary they substantially helped to spread the religion to non-Muslim parts of the Sudan, where neither Arabs nor Berbers had ever penetrated.

In the eleventh century, the dynamics of previous development in many Sudanese states appear to have reached a stage where the adoption of Islam offered a number of advantages to the ruling classes and to a widening group of local traders.

In the Mali empire the Islamization of its rulers occurred at the end of the thirteenth century under the descendants of Sundiata. Although Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and Ibn Ḳhaldūn maintain that this founding hero was converted to Islam, the Malinke oral tradition vehemently insists on his character as a pagan magician and denies any conversion. However, Sundiata's son and successor, Mansa Uli, had already performed the pilgrimage during the reign of the Mamluk Sultan Baybars (1260–77). From his time onwards, the royal pilgrimage became a permanent tradition among the *Mansas*. The Islamic outlook of the empire took shape in the fourteenth century under Mansa Mūṣā (c. 1312–37) and his brother Mansa Sulaymān (c. 1341–60), who encouraged the building of mosques and the development of Islamic learning.

The general climate of security during the heyday of the Mali empire was conducive to the expansion of trade in the western Sudan. Muslim traders operated various trade networks across the entire empire and ventured even beyond its frontiers. More and more Malinke were converted, as well as people from other ethnic groups, such as the Fulbe in the Senegal valley and Masina. One important development was the diligence and growth of a local clerical class, which was concentrated in the main political and commercial towns, like Niani and Gao, but especially in Jenne and Timbuktu. There is sufficient evidence to show that, at least until the sixteenth century, the majority of Muslim scholars in Timbuktu were of Sudanese origin, many of whom had studied in Fez and excelled in Islamic science and piety to such a degree as to arouse the admiration of foreign visitors. The establishment of a class of learned Muslim scholars and clerics of Sudanese origin was an important event in the history of Islam in Africa south of the Sahara. Islam was thereafter propagated and spread by autochthons armed with a knowledge of local languages, customs and beliefs; this knowledge facilitated their missionary work and assured them greater success than that obtained by their North African co-religionists in earlier times. In the eyes of the Africans, Islam ceased to be the religion of white expatriates, and, since the message was carried by Africans themselves, it became an African religion.

The influence of this new class of African clerics was felt as far as the central Sudan. Until the fourteenth century, the region between Lake Chad and the middle reaches of the Niger had formed something of a backwater in the spread of Islam, and Hausaland in particular was barely touched by missionary activities.

The local *Chronicles of Kano* record the arrival in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of at least two groups of Muslim scholars from the western Sudan who contributed to the spread of Islam and to its attainment of a higher doctrinal level. Apart from Kano,



3.3 The Islamized areas of Africa by c. 1500. (I. Hrbek)

Islam was also established in the second half of the fifteenth century in Zaria and Katsina, where at least the rulers and the courts became Muslims. There are also accounts of the arrival of *Shārīfs* (descendants of the Prophet) in Kano at that time; their presence led to the strengthening of the faith and the elimination of pagan survivals.

Even after these attempts to consolidate its strength, Islam was by no means generally accepted. It became the religion of small communities of traders and professional clerics. Court circles were influenced only superficially, whereas the mass of people persisted in their traditional beliefs. One important factor for the further spread of Islam in those parts of the Sudan was its ready acceptance by the Hausa traders, who became one of the most active Muslim commercial classes. With the opening up of trade routes to the kola-producing countries in the hinterland of the Gold Coast, they carried Islam to the forest fringes.

There were, of course, also some setbacks to the progress of Islam. The Mossi people in the Niger Bend resisted the spread of Islam for a long time, in spite of the fact that they had already come into contact with it in the fourteenth century, when they had attacked and sacked Timbuktu and even Walāta. In the closing years of the next century, *Askiya* Muḥammad launched a *djihād* against them on account of their rejection of his summons to adopt Islam. However, not even the defeat of his army could persuade the Mossi ruler to abandon his traditional religion, and the majority of his subjects followed his example. The Mossi kingdoms started to be penetrated by Muslim merchants (*Yarse*) only after the seventeenth century.

Another island of traditional religion was formed by the Bambara on the territory of the ancient Mali empire. Indeed, the Islamic culture of Mali had even regressed following the decline of the empire. Having lost their external possessions and being separated from the Saharan trade, the Malinke lived in small *kafu* (chiefdoms), without any central administration or urban settlements. Islam, having been abandoned by the political class, was represented by the commercial group (*Dyula*) or only by the clerics.

In general, however, by the sixteenth century Islam was established all along the Sudanese belt from the Atlantic to Lake Chad and beyond. The ruling classes of all the great states and the majority of the smaller ones were at least nominally Muslim. In all the towns and in many villages there lived communities of African Muslims of varying ethnic origins who were sometimes Muslims only in name, but were often men of piety and learning with a broad outlook and contacts with the wider world to the north of the Sahara. Although the majority of the peasants were only slightly affected by this universal religion, after so many centuries of its presence, Islam became a familiar phenomenon, and a part of the cultural landscape in West Africa.

Nubia and the Nilotic Sudan

The Islamization of this region has been – and indeed still is – a continuing process. Although Nubia had been in contact with Islam since the time of the Arab conquest of Egypt in the early seventh century, its spread was barred by the existence of the Christian Nubian states and the attachment of the Nubians to their Christian faith.

After a number of unsuccessful attempts to conquer Nubia, the Arabs concluded a treaty with the Nubian rulers. This *bakt*, as it was known, secured the independence of the Christian Nubian state for many centuries to come.⁷ Although there were occasional attempts to convert the rulers (for example, at the beginning of the Fāṭimid rule in Egypt), the general policy of the Muslim Egyptian governments was to leave the Christian kingdom undisturbed.

The friendly relationship between the Egyptian rulers and Nubian monarchs opened the doors for the penetration of Muslim traders. Although these merchants do not appear to have actively propagated the Islamic religion, they nevertheless brought the first elements of the new faith into these hitherto wholly Christian regions.

The Islamization (and Arabization) of Nubia was the work of quite different agents. As early as the eighth century, some nomadic Arab groups started to move from Upper Egypt towards Nubia, choosing mainly the region between the Nile valley and the Red Sea littoral. In the tenth century, they were already established in the extreme north of Nubia and at the same time some of the Nubians to the north of the Second Cataract had been converted to Islam. Other nomadic Arab groups migrated into the Bēdja country where their members intermarried with the Bēdja ruling families; and their children became chiefs of some of the Bēdja groups. A similar process of intermarriage also went on in Nubia and led to the establishment of powerful Muslim lineages. The northernmost Bēdja groups, the Hadāriba and 'Ababda, gradually became Arabized and even adopted fictitious Arab genealogies, but their ancient beliefs were only thinly disguised by Islam. By the fourteenth century, the majority of Bēdja can be said to have been formally Islamized, in that they considered themselves Muslims and were recognized as such by their co-religionists, although they still engaged in many of their traditional beliefs and practices.

Until the end of the twelfth century, as long as the Kingdom of al-Makurra still remained independent, the flow of Arab immigrants took rather the form of the gradual infiltration of small Bedouin groups. With the Mamluk interventions in the internal strife of the royal family, the Nubian kings became vassals or puppet rulers. In 1315, the Mamluks chose as Nubian king a prince who was already converted to Islam; and this event heralded the beginning of the decline of Nubian Christianity.

The disintegration of the northern Nubian kingdom, to which the earlier penetration of Arab groups had substantially contributed, facilitated the great Arab breakthrough to the rich pasture-lands beyond the Nubian desert. Although these Arab Bedouins were nominally Muslim, there is no reason to suppose that their Islam was any less superficial than that of other nomads. They can hardly be considered as fanatical proselytizers for their faith. On the other hand, the end of the Christian dynasty and thus the end of Christianity as a state religion must have made it much easier for Islam to be accepted by the sedentary population along the Nile valley. In the more southerly state of 'Alwa, it remained alive until the beginning of the sixteenth century, when it was overthrown by a joint action of Arab tribesmen and the Fundj.

In the wake of the nomadic Arabs came Muslim clerics and holy men. They arrived from or had studied in the older lands of Islam and they were the first to bring to this

7. See Chapter 8.

country some knowledge of the Holy Law (*sharī'a*). In the following centuries, the missionaries of the Sūfi orders began to settle in the Sudan and contributed to the preaching of Islam. They succeeded in converting the Fundj, a dark-skinned people, whose immediate place of origin was the upper Blue Nile. Under the rule of the Fundj kings, Islam was encouraged and many scholars and pious men migrated to their kingdom. From the sixteenth century onwards, the southern frontier of Islam was stabilized along the line of the thirteenth parallel.

The Horn of Africa

The penetration of Islam into Ethiopia went along two major trade routes leading into the interior from the Dahlak Islands and Zaylā'.

The Dahlak Islands had become Muslim at the beginning of the eighth century and at the same time other coastal places on the shores of the Red Sea began to be settled by Muslims, mostly of Arab or other non-African origin. Islam was propagated from these centres among the local, predominantly nomadic, peoples along the coast, but the impact of Islamization was not strong until after the tenth century.

The main obstacle to the spread of Islam in the highlands was the solid establishment of the Christian church among the Tigré and Amharic-speaking peoples in northern Ethiopia. The rulers undoubtedly welcomed Muslim merchants from the coastal settlements but they forbade them to propagate their faith. Already by the ninth century, Muslim communities had emerged in the main centres and along the major trade routes.

In the south, the gateway for the penetration of Islam was the important port of Zaylā' and it was in these southern parts of the Ethiopian region that Islam was destined to play a most prominent role.

The situation in the hinterland of Zaylā' was quite different from that prevailing in the north; it was a frontier region for both Christians and Muslims, who started there a struggle to win over the large indigenous population with traditional religious beliefs to their respective faiths. The conditions that allowed the growth of Islamic influence from the tenth century onwards were partly internal – the decline of the Christian kingdom – and partly external – the rise of Fāṭimid power in the Red Sea followed by a revival of trade.

The early Muslim trading cities and principalities on the shores of the Gulf of Aden began to expand along the Harar plateau at the end of the tenth century. By the beginning of the next century, the expansion of Islam had led to the founding of Muslim sultanates among the Semitic and Cushitic peoples of the region.

One of the more important Muslim kingdoms was that of Ifāt, whose rulers also claimed descent from the family of the Prophet Muḥammad through Abū Tālib; its greatest Sultan, 'Umar Walasma, annexed the Sultanate of Shoa to the Ifāt state in 1285.

Arabic and Ethiopian sources indicate the existence of at least three Muslim kingdoms apart from Ifāt: Dawāro (to the west of the Harar region), Sharka, in Arusi, and Bālī, south of Dawāro. In later times, we find mention of other states like Hadyā,

Arababnī and Darah. Hadyā in particular became famous as a centre of the slave-trade from the thirteenth century onwards.⁸

It is difficult to say how far and deep the Islamization of the local people, apart from the merchants and courtiers, extended in these early centuries. The Chronicle of the Shoa Sultanate reports major conversions in the interior only by the beginning of the twelfth century, especially in the eastern foothills of the Shoan plateau. In the Harar area, Arab inscriptions dating to the thirteenth century bear witness to the existence of well-developed Muslim communities, thereby confirming the importance of Harar as a diffusion centre of Islam in this area. During the Christian offensive to the south, Islam undoubtedly suffered heavy losses in influence and numbers. When, in the sixteenth century, Aḥmād Grañ started his *djihād* against Christian Ethiopia, he was able to recruit into his army many Afar and Somali from the plains, as well as the various Semitic- and Cushitic-speaking peoples from the plateau, who had already long been under Islamic influence. Even if this attempt to found a Muslim Ethiopian empire failed in the end, the eastern and southern fringes of Ethiopia remained firmly in the Islamic orbit.

The beginnings of the Islamization of the Somali are even more obscure. There is no doubt that the Somali groups living along the coast of the Gulf of Aden came very early into contact with Muslims. Arab and Persian merchants seem to have been the first settlers in coastal towns, where they intermarried with local women and eventually merged with local Somali inhabitants. They brought with them Islam as a religion, and influenced the Somali living in these settlements and in the immediate hinterland, who also gradually became Muslim. However, it took some centuries before the impact of these Muslims achieved more permanent success. Somali traditions record that Shaykh Darod Ismā'il arrived from Arabia, settled among the Dir and became the ancestor of a huge clan family called, after him, Darod. It is generally accepted that this event occurred in the tenth or eleventh century. There is a similar tradition about the arrival, some two centuries later, of another Arab, Shaykh Ishāk, founder of the Isaq Somali, who settled to the west of the Darod. These traditions appear to be the reflection of a period of intensive Islamization among the northern Somali, as well as the growth and expansion of the Darod and Isaq clans at about the same time. The creation of the large clan families united by the bond of Islam released the internal dynamic forces and prompted a general movement of these groups into the interior of the Horn in a general southward direction, where they exercised a proselytizing influence on the hitherto untouched Somali-speaking groups.

The Somali living along the Indian Ocean coast owed their acquaintance with Islam to the coastal towns of Mogadishu, Brava and Marka, where Arab and other Muslim merchants had been established in considerable numbers since the tenth century. The eventual merging with the local inhabitants gave rise to a mixed Somali-Arab culture and society, whose most important common feature was its Muslim character. These coastal towns, being primarily trading posts, must have been in regular contact with the Somali of the hinterland. Whether they contributed to the spread of Islam to the same degree as did the profoundly Islamized northern groups remains unknown.

8. For the history of these states, see Chapter 20 of this volume.

The East African coast and the islands

The arrival and settlement of Muslim Arabs and Persians on the East African coast and in the Comoro Islands and Madagascar will be discussed in detail in the relevant chapters of this volume.⁹ Here, we shall be concerned only with the spread of Islam; in this respect, in the period under review, the region presents a picture that differs significantly from the parts of tropical Africa already discussed. It is true that Islam flourished here, but only as a religion of immigrants from overseas living in closed-class communities in coastal or insular settlements. Although both archaeological and Arabic sources adduce sufficient evidence as to the Islamic character of many coastal towns stretching from Lamu to Mozambique, at the same time they confirm that Islam did not penetrate into the interior and that neither the Bantu nor any other ethnic groups were touched by this religion until the nineteenth century. Islam attained success only among those coastal peoples who came into immediate contact with the Arab and/or Persian expatriates in the towns.

The society of coastal cities was doubtless Islamic but not Arabic. The immigrants, who were never very numerous, intermarried with African women and became integrated with the local inhabitants. For a long time to come, the Islamized element in East Africa represented a tiny minority, whose outlook was directed towards the ocean rather than to Africa itself.

An exception to this general rule was the penetration of Muslim, mostly Swahili, merchants into the hinterland of present-day Mozambique and into Zimbabwe. Sixteenth-century Portuguese sources abound with accounts of the presence of thousands of 'Moorish' merchants active in the Mutapa empire, whose competition was bitterly felt by the Portuguese. The majority of these traders were black Africans, either Swahili immigrants from the older coastal centres to the north, or local people who had adopted the international trading culture of Muslim urban societies.

The penetration of coastal Muslims into the interior of south-east Africa did not leave any discernible Islamic heritage among the peoples of the region. To all intents and purposes, Islam failed to be accepted as a religion by the Africans in the interior in spite of their centuries-long contacts with Muslims.

The coastal Muslims showed a more proselytizing spirit in the Comoro Islands. The 'Shirazi', to whom the Kilwa Chronicle ascribes the Islamization of Kilwa, are said also to have settled on Anjouan. It is likely that the first Muslims came in about the thirteenth century; they mixed with the local Malagasy and Africans on the islands and gave rise to a people known as Antalaotra ('people of the sea'). According to some recent studies, the final Islamization of the Comoro Islands occurred in the fifteenth century.

In spite of the considerable progress made during recent decades in studying Islam in Madagascar, there still remain more unanswered than answered questions. There is no doubt that Islamized peoples, whether of Arab or, more likely, of Swahili origin, were starting to settle from the tenth century onwards on the north-west coast and nearby small offshore islands, as evidenced by archaeology, oral traditions and early

9. See Chapters 21 and 25 respectively.

Portuguese accounts. From the north, the Islamized peoples spread along the whole east coast as far as Fort-Dauphin.

The traditions of some Malagasy groups claim an Arab origin for their ancestors, not only in the north but especially in the south-east, the most important of these groups being the Zafiraminia, Onjatsy and Antemoro. The 'Arab' immigrants were gradually assimilated into the local Malagasy population and all that remained of their Islamic civilization was the Arabic script (*sorabe*), vague memories of the Qoran and some socio-religious practices (mostly in the field of geomancy and magic), but there are traces neither of any Islamic institutions nor of mosques. These groups can thus hardly be spoken of as Muslims.

By contrast, since the Muslims in the north were in continuous contact with the outside Islamic world and were strengthened by waves of new immigrants, they retained their religion and even managed to spread it to some of their Malagasy neighbours. The profoundly Islamic character of these settlements is confirmed by early Portuguese visitors in the sixteenth century, who spoke of many mosques and of *shaykhs* and *kādīs* as the representatives of political and religious authority. As in the Comoro Islands, the inhabitants of these city states were known as Antalaoatra, an expression still used today to denote one category of Islamized inhabitants of Madagascar.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that Islam did not play the same role in Madagascar as it did in other parts of tropical Africa where, with the course of time, it became the religion of entire ethnic groups and profoundly influenced African societies. It never superimposed its own culture over the Malagasy model and, indeed, in the more remote parts of the island, a reverse process, i.e. the absorption of Islamized people by the local cultural milieu, was to be observed.

Conclusion

Between the seventh and sixteenth centuries, Islam had become established through large parts of Africa. Its dissemination was not a uniform and linear process in all areas, since different methods, ways and agents were employed in each part of Africa. The following patterns of Islamization can be roughly discerned:

- (1) The Arab conquest of Egypt and North Africa. Although it was not accompanied by any enforced conversion of the Coptic and Berber autochthons, it nevertheless created social and economic conditions which led in due course to the acceptance of Islam by the majority of the local peoples.
- (2) The commercial activities of Muslims, firstly long-distance or overseas trade and subsequently regional trade, functioned as a stimulus for Islamization in much of tropical Africa. The first agents were merchants of Arab (in the east predominantly from Arabia itself), Persian (in the same region) and Berber (in the west) origin. From the eleventh century onward, the proselytizing process was continued through the activities of Muslim Africans – Soninke, Malinke, Fulbe, Kanembu, Hausa, etc.
- (3) The clerics or holy men were the first to introduce Islam among the Somali,

whereas in other regions they contributed to the consolidation of faith among formally Islamized peoples (West Africa and eastern Sudan) and to spreading it further in the wake of merchants.

- (4) In the Nilotic Sudan, Islamization followed the penetration of Arab nomads, whereas in Somaliland the migrations of some clan families to the south were a contributory factor in the spread of the new faith to other groups.

In North Africa, Nubia and Ethiopia, the incoming Muslims encountered a rival monotheistic faith in Christianity. The resistance of local Christians to Islamization varied with local political and social conditions. In the Maghrib, where the Christians represented only a minority (mostly of mixed or foreign origin), Islamization was more complete and Christianity died out by the eleventh century. In Egypt, the process took longer and was stepped up only under the Fāṭimids; Islamization was never altogether complete, since about 10% of all Egyptians still belong to the Coptic Church.

In Christian Nubia, by contrast, the impact of Islam until the end of the thirteenth century was minimal but, during the next two centuries, Christianity gradually vanished and was superseded by Islam. Only in the Ethiopian highlands were Christians able to resist. Neither the peaceful penetration of Muslim merchants nor the military campaigns of the Muslim states to the south of the plateau shattered the fidelity of Ethiopians to the faith of their forefathers. Although Christianity in Ethiopia emerged victorious from this centuries-long struggle, it remained an isolated enclave in a Muslim sea.

4

*Islam
as a social system
in Africa since the seventh century*

Islam as a religion, and thus as a constituent part of spiritual and social culture, is one of the fundamental aspects of modern African civilization, to the extent that many inhabitants of the continent often regard Islam and Africa as being a single entity.

The message of Islam was expressed in a language in which God had 'sent down His word', but Arabic became, moreover, the vehicle of a specific culture that was at first Arabic and then Islamic. Islam could therefore be the bearer of a cultural hegemony which was a source of conflict with other cultures rooted in other types of societies. The pre-Islamic cultures and societies in the Near East were worthy of note, in particular, by reason of their written heritage and Islamic culture became, to some degree, their continuation. The case of African cultures and societies was more difficult to deal with. Indeed, since, unlike the inhabitants of the Near East and the Ethiopians, they did not possess a Book which is the pledge of a divine revelation, the black Africans and their religion were, from the outset, categorized among the peoples without a respectable religion, incapable of acquiring the status of protégés of Islam and therefore hardly likely to possess respectable languages and cultures.

Islam, African peoples and their cultures

Islam proclaims a unity which does not preclude cultural diversity. It strongly affirms the unity of the human race and recognizes all men as having an identical nature, created by God. They all belong to the 'race' of Adam to whom God has granted, in pre-eternity, the 'primordial pact'. At this level of theoretical generality, the profound unity of Islam could not raise any problems for Africans.

Underneath this unity, which is easy to grasp and to accept, there appears a second level of contact with Islam: the observances that denote that one belongs to the Muslim community and thus, also, the prohibition on engaging in forms of religious life other than those required by the Qoran. Unity in the faith and in religious practice, the fraternal solidarity among believers who are all 'brothers', hospitality and justice which flow from this sense of community: these, similarly, pose no serious theoretical problems. The social ideal of the Muslim faithful is seen as being adapted to the forces of human nature by practising mutual assistance, hospitality, generosity, the honouring of commitments towards members of the community (*'umma*) firstly, but towards

other communities, too, and the tempering of desire. This is the expression of the profound unity which characterizes Islam and which gives it its uniqueness. This spirit of community is clearly compatible with deep-seated African traditions of social organization. However, this unity co-exists with a truly personal moral responsibility; no one can be charged with the fault of another; everyone must be responsible for his own actions. Thus, the sense of community, the feeling that one is part of a whole, is united, as though by a dialectical process, with a concern for one's own destiny and for one's own obligations.

It must at the outset be noted that the act of embracing Islam is an individual one; if it is to be a responsible act, it must be freely chosen: moral and physical coercion are prohibited by the Qoran. But it is also a *social* conversion which denotes the act of joining a community of a new type and severing links with other types of socio-cultural community. This is a fundamental point at issue for the relations between the Muslim world and the societies and cultures of Africa. An African of a different religion could not be forced to embrace Islam; however, his religious status – without a scripture – made him entirely dependent on Islam and with no protection *vis-à-vis* the Muslim community.

We have thus moved towards a third level of contacts: that of the law. It was almost three centuries before legal rules were established in the Muslim world in accordance with the Qoran and the teachings of the Prophet – the *Sunna*. The sacred law – *sharī'a* – gathers together the Qoranic prescriptions supplemented by the prohibitions and clarifications contained in the jurisprudence (*fikh*). The law has been interpreted by four schools of jurisprudence in varying ways and in a spirit which differed in its degree of literalness and rigour. One interesting feature is that the legal schools of jurisprudence with which the Africans had to deal were not the same on the west as they were on the east of the continent. The west, from the Maghrib to West Africa, bore the deep and almost exclusive imprint of Mālikism. The Māliki school, which was more formalistic, particularly after its triumphs in the eleventh century, than certain other juridical schools, was brought to a high degree of intransigency. To the east, Shāfi'ism, which was strongly established in Egypt and was more liberal, was generally predominant in the Horn of Africa and on the East Coast.

Lastly, it must be added that the eleventh century witnessed a movement in two directions which are contradictory only in appearance. On the one hand, triumphant Sunnism tended to impose uniformity, through the law, on the authority of the state and on education, and a single Muslim rite; on the other hand, there reappeared with a new vigour Islamic mysticism (Sufism), which had long been opposed and which sought to express religious feeling through asceticism and rejection of the world. The Maghrib was the first to extend a warm welcome to these mystics. In the twelfth century there appeared brotherhoods, the first of which was the Qādirīyya; in Morocco, the Shadhīlyya brotherhood was popularized by al-Djazūlī in the fifteenth century and played both a political and a religious role. Both these eleventh-century trends had profound repercussions on the dialogue between Islam and African societies. The first, which was dominated by Mālikism, made the Muslim community more intransigent in its dealings with African cultural traditions. The other spread with great success the cult of holy men – the bearers of the blessing (*baraka*) – who were able to be healers

and divines and were prepared to Islamize certain very ancient aspects of the daily life of the Africans. In the eyes of simple people, who were always ready to believe in miracles, the saints and *marabouts* seemed more accessible than the majestic and distant God of Islam. The cult of local saints sometimes negated the obligation of the pilgrimage to Mecca and sometimes assimilated an earlier cult. There accordingly developed, first in the Maghrib and then – particularly after the seventeenth century – in West Africa, the dominant social figure of western Islam, the *marabout*.

Thus the development of Islamic law, its sponsorship of specialists supported by the state, and the rise of mysticism concern the life of African societies much more intimately than faith or mere observance. In these matters the meeting was not to be as easy as earlier meetings had been. The danger here was one of confusion between the norms of the social life of the Near East and the faith of Islam.

There was a risk that a fourth dimension would play a part: that of cultural emulation of the Arab model, thus implying renunciation of African cultural traditions and total endorsement of the values of the Arab world, whether these were regarded as desirable and superior or whether they were imposed. In this context, there was a possibility of confusion between Arabization and Islamization.

This is something that can be gauged even before one embarks on an analysis of the process whereby Islam became established as a social system in Africa; it was a meeting between peoples, cultures and societies of different traditions, a meeting whose results depended on the extent to which each side was able to distinguish between what was merely cultural and what was of general religious significance. This was ultimately a question of the permeability of African societies and cultures, which were in no sense passive, to the new influence that came from the east. This also means that any approach to Islam as a social system implies a study of the phenomena of Islamization and conquest, the meeting of peoples. The fact of geographical coexistence made it inevitable that there would be dialogue between Muslims of diverse origins and between Muslims and non-Muslims through the delineation of Islamic space within which the following problem is posed: is there, or is there not, unity in the monolithic meaning of the term or is there unity in diversity?

A period of easy coexistence: the eleventh century

The tenacious struggle of the Berbers against certain forms of Islamization¹ has all too often been cited as evidence to support the claim that in black Africa the conquest was violent. In fact, the Arabs often halted in their progress southwards when they encountered resistance which was too difficult to overcome in historical and political contexts that were unknown, little known or difficult to control: hence their very limited incursions towards Nubia, towards the Fezzān and Kawār, towards the Sūs and the western Sahara.² These incursions did not have far-reaching effects and their results were in most cases compromises, which ensured that the populations of the south enjoyed peace. The Islamization of Egypt and the Maghrib took, in the long

1. See Chapter 3 of this volume.

2. See Chapters 8, 9 and 11 of this volume.

term, forms which are considered in other chapters of this volume.³

The penetration of Islam into black Africa had very complex and essentially non-violent aspects during this initial period: the Islamized Berbers of the desert, the *Khāridjite* merchants or the representatives of Fātimid interests played roles that were very different but were not marked by significant violence. Opinions vary even on the methods employed by the Almoravids in their dealings with the black peoples at the end of this first period. There has been too great a tendency to rely on historical writings strongly influenced by the victory of the believers over the unbelievers and the glorification of certain heroes like 'Uḡba ibn Nāfi'.

In fact, in the early centuries, the Muslim world had preoccupations which were very different north of the Sahara, on the one hand, and south of the Sahara and in East Africa, on the other.

In the first case, strategic considerations were of immense importance, since North Africa was at the same time a springboard for further expansion towards Spain, the Mediterranean islands and Italy, as well as a bastion against any return of the warring Christians, who remained a constant threat.

The Berbers occupied vast areas from the Atlantic to the Nile; they roamed through them and controlled them by means of the camel. They led highly varied forms of life, ranging from the completely sedentary to the fully nomadic.⁴ To the north of the African continent, they also were obliged to conform to the political demands of the *Dār-al-Islām*. Although efforts were made by the orthodoxy to eliminate the dangerous – and persistent – traces of religious syncretism, the Berbers retained a degree of originality within Islam and a certain linguistic autonomy. For a long time, a tolerant view was taken of their respect for traditions which did not affect the essential features of Muslim life. For instance, customary law and non-Qoranic judicial organization are characteristic features of Berber law, as exemplified by the collective oath as a means of proof, the regulations and scale of penalties known by the name of *Iḡānūn* (*kānūn*), and justice administered by judge-arbiters or village assemblies. Such customs did not come into conflict with Qoranic law, but they may have constituted an element of resistance to the standardizing progress of Sunnism–Mālikism in the Almoravid period; in any case, we find these features reflected in the organization of the Almohad empire. After the major confrontations of the eighth century, the territorial and political integration of the Berbers of the north was more or less an accomplished fact; it was vital for the Muslim world.

To the south of the Sahara, the Muslims entered regions inhabited by peoples with a strong cultural and social identity and where there existed ancient states that were as powerful as those in North Africa or in Western Europe at the same date. The world of the Soninke to the west, that of the Zaghāwa or the Kānembu in the centre, and that of the Bantu-speakers to the east surprised the Muslims, who were not slow in making major ethnographical descriptions of them. They did not seek to convert them and still less to make them abandon their religious, cultural and social practices. For a long time they were content to coexist as merchants, a situation which was of benefit

3. See Chapters 3, 7 and 9 of this volume.

4. See Chapter 9 of this volume.

to them and in which they enjoyed for the most part cordial relations with the black princes and merchants. This policy, moreover, was not without benefit even from the religious point of view.

Prior to the twelfth century, Islam advanced on African soil without wars, without violent proselytism. These advances had no decisive bearing on *Dār-al-Islām*; they were not irreversible, they took far greater account of princes and merchants than of cultivators. But, even so, certain major achievements had been made before the great efforts to extend *Dār-al-Islām* which developed from the eleventh century onwards.

Often what took place was no more than a formal conversion of the prince: the anecdote relating to the conversion of a chief of Mallal eloquently bears out this point.⁵ Later, we shall refer to the somewhat surprising fact that the *Mansa* of Mali, when in Cairo during the pilgrimage, showed a very superficial knowledge of the Muslim rules of life. If this is true of the princes, what is to be said of the 'converted' merchants, who were loyal associates for commercial purposes but were probably rather superficial Muslims? As for the rural world, there was no question of influencing its beliefs and practices; that would have meant disrupting an entire society and its modes of production. It remains possible, moreover, that the rulers who converted to Islam saw a very definite advantage in doing so; they were thereby enabled to shed the numerous obligations inherent in the exercise of power in Africa with its organized counterbalances that controlled its execution, and not to share the advantages of the new faith with their dependants. Up to a certain point, Islam was able to exalt the ancient powers and even the authority of kingship.

In Arab sources we find many references to the disappearance of gold when the producers were converted to Islam. This possibility was equally disastrous for the Muslim north (as the client) and for the local rulers, who were the middlemen. Thus the gold producers were not converted, and they were very numerous.⁶ Al-'Umarī explains that the *Mansa* of Mali tolerated in his empire 'the existence' of the pagan population, which he exempted from the tax that was imposed on unbelievers but which he employed in gold mining. The fundamental reason is that gold prospecting and production were accompanied by a number of magical operations and were bound up with a system of beliefs of which we can still discern traces.

The same applied to iron, which provides perhaps an even clearer example than gold. In many areas there was a close association between royal authority and the master smelters and smiths. The figure of the 'blacksmith' is also associated with magic, with the dangerous power of the ironmasters. With the passage of time, this 'type' becomes more and more antithetical to that of the *marabout*. The *marabout* – or, more simply, the bearer of Muslim law – was to eliminate the influence of the ironworker: Islamization seems to have been accompanied by a break in the earlier alliance between royal power and the ironworkers. The latter were still feared on account of their magical and economic power and gradually formed an isolated group. Since their role was essential, they were not excluded from economic life; gradually there arose around them the notion of caste and the contempt in which they were held

5. J. M. Cuoq, 1975, pp. 101 and 195–6, see also Chapter 3 of this volume.

6. See Chapter 14 of this volume.

provides an indication of the fear inspired by their magic. This example indicates what a long and slow process was involved in the introduction of the Muslim social system, and how cautious it was when it first came into contact with such deep-rooted habits.

The groups of Muslim merchants established south of the desert lived there in minority communities and enjoyed, on the part of the pagan rulers, a treatment comparable to that accorded to Christian or Jewish minorities in Islamic lands, but they were probably excused the payment of taxes.

The Ibādites clearly played a major role during this period. Their easy relationship with the *Sūdān* (Negroes) may be noted with some surprise, particularly as they behaved with such acrimony towards other Muslims. This is probably one indication of the excellent relations which, for centuries, the Saharan Berbers maintained with the black populations.

Ibādite sources provide examples of genuine mutual religious tolerance and of a large measure of understanding towards 'pagan' African cultures and their social practices.

Things changed with the triumph of Sunni orthodoxy in the eleventh century and the emergence of religious phenomena that were far less ready to display tolerance, such as the Almoravid movement. This was the beginning of a second period in which the efforts of Islam were increasingly directed towards the standardization of patterns of life in the lands under its influence.

Social and cultural tensions after the eleventh century

In the social sphere everything depended on the permeability of African societies to any changes proposed or imposed by Islam, since there were in principle no obstacles to the adoption of the faith in one single God.

The black African societies which were penetrated by Islam were rural; they had functional links with the land and with all features of their immediate environment (mineral, vegetable, air and water). The nuclear family – man, wife, children – was unknown as an autonomous unit; the extended family, consisting of the descendants of a common ancestor bound together by ties of kinship and land, was the basic component, united by a high degree of economic solidarity. These communities, whatever their size, considered that their ties – even if they were notional – were religious and that they had a sacred bond with the soil, the bush and the waters that provided food and were objects of worship. These socio-religious structures could not be dissociated without destroying the entire balance of their life.

Even in more complex societies, where a surplus product allowed the existence of social categories specialized in distinct tasks (magicians and healers, political leadership, military, etc.), the African man retained his vision of the world as a vast confrontation of forces that were to be exorcised or exploited. Very often the unity of the religious perception of social relationships prevailed over differences in material detail; very often, the role of the mother and the woman in the transmission of property remained considerable. The forms of life remained very remote from those of the clan and of the patrilineal family of the Arabs with which Islamic law is in almost perfect harmony.

It was in this field that tensions and conflicts arose. Pressure was exerted by Muslim

jurists, who would have liked to induce the Africans to commit themselves more fully to a 'model of society' assumed to be Islamic. The forms taken by these tensions vary widely from one region to another and at different times, depending also on relationships of strength of every kind between Muslims and non-Muslims. Thus, when we endeavour to appraise the way in which Islam transformed or failed to transform the societies of black Africa, we are dealing with a rich and complex history.

When the scene of events was a town, it was probably possible to change one's name and merge into a new Islamic community which satisfied all one's needs, and to establish in that community a new family on new ideological foundations. From the social point of view, the change of name permits an elegant and simple transfer, from the original community to the Muslim community. In Sahelian Africa, this transfer seems to have been easy but, rightly, it does not denote a total break: a Muslim name, strongly Africanized – Muḥammad becomes Mamadu, 'Alī becomes Aliyu – is added to the existing African names: these are only Islamized in the long term and in accordance with very precise codes. The same was not the case in other regions of the continent, where onomastic breaks were massive and dramatic.

The Muslims themselves were divided as to the attitude to be adopted towards African socio-cultural traditions. The jurists from the north tended to see in the 'non-conformist' actions of black societies the proof that they belonged to a world that was alien to Islam and had to be opposed; the black Muslims who were born in these societies were much more inclined to regard the practices of African religions as not constituting a real obstacle to the acceptance of Islam; their tolerance might be very extensive and their co-religionists from the north readily accused them of permissiveness, of collusion or even of treason to Islam. It was, however, the latter rather than the former who, as we shall see, ensured the most lasting successes of Islam from the twelfth to the sixteenth century.

Juridical intransigence was a cause of tension over the question of altering the matrilineal rules of succession in favour of the patrilineal practices. This conflict undoubtedly arose as early as the eleventh century; its most celebrated instance was the consultation of al-Māghilī, to which we shall refer later: the author stated that those who rejected Muslim legislation and applied a matrilineal line of inheritance were not Muslims.

It was probably in connection with the concept of the ownership of goods that the incompatibility between one society and the other proved the strongest. When al-Bakhrī spoke of some 'bizarre decisions' of 'Abdallāh ibn Yāsīn, he displayed the distaste of an individualistic owner towards 'socializing' forms, equality and the redistribution of property which the Almoravid cleric wished to impose. All the more reason, then, that the African community of land, work and harvests was barely comprehensible to Muslims accustomed to individual family and urban wealth.

The apparently milder protests against 'African immorality' were equally ineffectual: the excessive laxity in the behaviour of women, their failure to wear the veil, nudity among adolescents – Arab writers could do no more than record or denounce the 'scandals' which offended their sight.

At all these levels underlying their respective and hardly compatible forms of organization, the difference between Arab Muslim societies and African societies,

whether they were Muslim or otherwise, remained unreconciled between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries.

The role played by African rulers

African rulers in general accepted fairly readily a division of space and labour which ensured that the administrators they required would be available to them in the towns which had been wholly or partly Islamized, while the rural world constituted an inexhaustible source of compliant agricultural manpower whose conversion was not a matter of urgency. Being content with the conversion of the princes who, in the long term, were the guarantors of the conversion of the masses, Islam probably adopted a 'pastoral' attitude which was also to be found in Christian Europe at the same periods.

African rulers, even if they were Muslims, cannot by any stretch of the imagination be said to have been active proselytizers. However, there was no lack of attempts to achieve political and social integration on the Islamic model, both on their part and on that of their Muslim advisers from North Africa. One thinks, for example, of *Mansa* Kankū Mūsā returning from the east with the architect al-Sāhīlī, or Askīya Muḥammad I or the dynast of Kano, Muḥammad Rumfa, both of whom called on the services of the pious cleric of Tlemcen, al-Maghīlī, or on those of the Egyptian al-Suyūṭī. Many authors tend to endorse the severe judgement pronounced by al-Idrīsī: 'men of learning and distinction are almost unknown among them, and their kings only acquire what they know about government and justice from the instruction of learned visitors from further north'. To think like al-Idrīsī is to forget that African societies, long before their contact with Islam, invented forms of political organization of which we are today gaining a better knowledge but of which both Muslims and Christians knew nothing for centuries. The ways in which power was exercised, which formed an integral part of the African religious sense, could not be abandoned without the consent of society as a whole and without total submission to Islam. We are thus entitled to wonder whether the black rulers did not take from Muslim society, with its belief in a single God, what was convenient and effective for the administration of their empire and whether these attempts at 'modernization' did not constitute a series of attempts to establish a balance between the 'weight' of pre-Islamic African tradition and the 'requirements of the new religion'.

Using a few specific examples, we can examine the real scope of the royal policy of integration with Islam.

The fourteenth century is often regarded in African historiography south of the Sahara as being the age which saw the high point of the empire of Mali, characterized by remarkable economic development, by political influence on an international scale involving diplomatic relations with Morocco and Egypt, and, above all, by the decisive establishment of Islam.

Although there is no doubt about the Islamic piety of *Mansa* Mūsā, the pilgrim king, and without denying that, mainly in the towns, Islam was to some extent established, the peasant masses, who formed the overwhelming majority of the population of Mali, retained their traditional religion and this was tolerated by the *Mansa* in exchange for their obedience and their taxes.

Let us look one-and-a-half centuries ahead: the end of the fifteenth century and the sixteenth century provide other examples of the desire expressed by certain Muslim clerics to bring about a profound transformation of African habits, and of the indecisive response of rulers to such pressure.

Askiya Muḥammad made considerable efforts to achieve political and social integration in line with the ethic of the Qoran. In order to legitimize his *coup d'état*, he resorted to every means afforded by the Muslim religion. He made the pilgrimage to Mecca and the title of caliph (*khalīfa*) invested him with spiritual authority in the Sudan. In the interior, he sought the advice almost exclusively of Muslim scholars of Timbuktu and in addition requested consultations from three outstanding jurists: 'Abdullāh al-Ansamānī of Takedda, al-Suyūfī and al-Māghilī.

Askiya Muḥammad, wishing to conform to the model of what was required of a caliph, adopted the oriental insignia of power: a seal, a sword and a Qoran; he declared Friday to be the day of the weekly audience, he undertook holy wars – though without success – against the 'infidels'. But he was unable to distance himself from the African traditions which enjoined him to retain the ancestral attributes inherited from the time of the preceding dynasty: a drum, sacred fire, precise regulations concerning dress, hair-style and regalia, the catching of the ruler's spittle, the existence in the higher administration of the high priest of the worship of ancestors and genies.

Similarly, he did not put into practice the unbending advice given by al-Māghilī against the 'false Muslims' by whom the *askiya* was surrounded. The teachings of al-Māghilī remained dormant in West Africa until 'Uṭhmān Dan Fodio turned them into a weapon against the princes who were then of no further use to the expansion of Islam.

In Bornu the rulers (*mai*), who were true living gods, nevertheless filled their courts with learned Muslims. These tried in the reign of 'Alī ibn Dūnama (1472–1504) to bring the morals of the notables into line with the Qoranic prescriptions. The sultan acquiesced, but the notables refused to comply. Similarly, the justice administered by the *Kāqī* was confined to the towns and did not replace the law of African groups. In Hausaland, where Islam was introduced in the fourteenth century, both rulers and zealots experienced the same difficulties in inducing rural, or even urban, populations to adopt the Muslim religion. In Katsina, after the visit of al-Māghilī, who tried to purify the lukewarm Islam of the Hausa, 'sacred woods of the animists were razed to the ground and in their place mosques were built'.

The apparent inaction of the kings was probably an indication of their awareness that social pressures would lead to the rejection of Islam.

It was outside their control, 'at the grass-roots', that the most substantial advances of Islam were achieved during these centuries. African merchants, Wangara and later Dyula and Muslim missionaries of all types carried the message of Islam to the countryside and to the towns as far as the forest fringe. This slow expansion did not overturn the habits of societies within which small groups of Muslims were coming into existence.

The results

At the present state of research, the results are very difficult to assess and their apparent contradictions are disconcerting.

There is no doubt that the art of writing and techniques of weighing were introduced south of the Sahara by Islam as early as the tenth century. To what extent did these two innovations upset earlier habits? What were the earlier habits as regards conservation of traces of the past, counting and mathematical knowledge?

It may justifiably be said that literature in the Arabic language south of the Sahara seems to have paid no regard to African cultures and their languages. Those who were literate 'in Arabic' ignored ancient African cultures both because they were pagan and, more simply, because they were unaware of their existence. It would probably be unjust to regard such ignorance as denoting preconceived contempt for African societies and cultures.

It was normal for such educated Malinke, Fulani, Soninke, Berbers or Negro-Berbers, such men as Mourimagha Kankoi of Jenne, Baghayogho, Kāti, Ibn Dansal al-Fülānī, Aḥmad Bābā, ibn al-Mukhtār Gombele of Timbuktu, and so forth, who were committed to the letter and spirit of Islam, to think in Arabic, write in Arabic and produce commentaries on books belonging to the Islamic traditions. This Islamocentrism no doubt made the universities of Timbuktu seem less brilliant than black Africans today would wish, as they can discern in those universities, as far as our present knowledge goes, hardly a trace of their cultural past. Muslim scholars belonged to a fairly closed world and were still a minority group facing a mass of 'pagans' whom they thought themselves duty-bound to convert and perhaps to guide towards other styles of life; thus they were not predisposed to become enlightened historians of the African past or even sympathetic observers of the life of 'pagan' societies.

Islamization–Arabization

It was probably in Kānem and in East Africa that the final transformation of African society first took place: the 'Arabization' of their origins and their past. West Africa was not slow in taking the same path.

When, in the thirteenth century, the genealogists of the Kānembu dynasty tried to reconstitute the noble lineage of the reigning princes, they did not demur to make one vitally important innovation, namely to seek those origins in the East.

This was the inception of an idea that was to prove enormously successful and to bring about a profound change in the cultural relationship between African societies and the Muslim world. Any prince of any standing had to come from the East; the only noble origins were those of the Orient and no past was to be so spoken of except if it were related to the Prophet, his family or his companions.

Genealogical literature was to flourish after the fourteenth century in East Africa, where it became one of the weapons in the ideological conflict between opposing Muslim tendencies and between reigning houses as late as the nineteenth century. In West Africa, the transformation of the stories concerning the origin of the Mandingo

was spectacular, and that of the origins of the founders of the Wagadu was equally so. Gradually, every Islamized group of any importance discovered an ancestor from Arabia. This considerably strengthened the theory according to which African populations came from the Middle East, with all the diffusionist consequences that this theory implied. Another aspect was the propensity for discovering 'white' origins - in this case Arab and Persian - for everything of any value in Africa, even if that meant totally devaluing the most anciently attested African cultures. Thus began the eclipse of African history, which was later to be considerably exacerbated by the Europeans.

No dominant family or group ultimately escaped this logic of 'Arabization'. Even the remote Betsileo of central Madagascar, who had no Muslim tradition, were fascinated by the 'civilizing model' of Islam and sought out Arab origins for their princes; they were not, incidentally, the only ones to have done so in Madagascar.

This 'genealogical snobbery' provided a guarantee of the age and quality of the Islamic practices of those who traced their origins to Arab ancestors; it also guaranteed the 'historic rights' of the aristocracies that were becoming established. It finally took on so much importance that it became the normal process of the Arabization-Islamization of many groups. The Maba in Waddai are a good case in point; until the sixteenth century they had not been exposed to any Islamic influence. The actual or mythical arrival among them of an Arab claiming to be of Abbasid origin, called Djāmē, at the end of the sixteenth century, changed the course of events. As the new religion progressively gained more ground, certain Maba clans laid claim to an Arab-Muslim origin. Before long the Arabs married into the great Maba families; they became semi-sedentary and more or less adopted the Islamic traditions of the Maba. The influences were in both directions. The Maba learned the language of the Arabs and thus considered that they had no difficulty in understanding the Qoran. As the teaching of Islam spread, the Maba sought not only to imitate the Arab model offered by Islam but also to identify themselves with the Arabs. In each clan, the chief, who was installed and maintained by power, sought out an origin in the Arab-Muslim world; the line was traced back in most cases to the family of the Prophet or, more modestly, to one of his four direct companions.

Islamization, together with Arabization, had very important repercussions on the whole of Maba society. The Maba unconsciously tried to rewrite their history by fabricating fictitious genealogies accompanied by a complete change of name.

The last link in the chain of transformations brought about by Islam in the life of African societies is probably the most significant of all. It leads to a total 'deculturation' of the societies in which it gains a complete hold, creates a 'black Arabism' which seems like a historical contradiction and which culturally impoverishes the Muslim community. Many African societies did not react like the Maba. They assessed the damage implied by the alternatives offered or imposed. On occasions, their reaction was even to reject Islam. Ultimately those most concerned by this problem were those who, having been kept aside from the transformations brought about by Islam, suffered from them because of the contempt for their beliefs and an attitude that viewed them as no more than an inexhaustible source of slaves. In many cases, therefore, mistrust arose and led a certain number of African societies to open rejection and confrontation.

The interrupted dialogue: late sixteenth – early seventeenth centuries

The end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries mark an important stage in West African history. It was an interlude between the end of a long and extremely rich period which saw the emergence and development of the principal black sub-Saharan states as well as the confrontation of two world views, that of the traditional religion of the African continent and that of Islam, and the beginning of another, admittedly shorter, period of serious disturbances and uncertainty during which the Muslim religion apparently paused in its expansion or even, in many regions, retreated.

It was during the Songhay empire, under the leadership of Sonni 'Alī (1464–92) that this anti-Muslim reaction took its most vigorous form; it was directed not against persons but rather against the influence of the ideology they professed, which was regarded as incompatible with traditional African values.

With the weakening of the central authority of Mali, various regions, country areas and urban centres became independent. The rich, cosmopolitan urban populations, well organized and structured by Islam, began to act as autonomous or even independent merchant republics. This was the case with Jenne, Walāta and Timbuktu, for example. In the new Songhay empire, which, by conquest, had inherited the eastern provinces of Mali, the relations between Sonni 'Alī and these towns, particularly Timbuktu, rapidly deteriorated into serious conflict. The determining factor seems to have been the reason of state rooted in the primacy of the imperial authority. Sonni 'Alī, the emperor magician, raised in the ethos of the all-powerful African monarch, could not bear to see his supernatural power, which was recognized by the great mass of his subjects adherent to African traditional religion, challenged by the Muslim scholars of Timbuktu, who were, moreover, foreigners. The Berbers, the Negro-Berbers and the Fulani formed, indeed, the overwhelming majority of the population of that town. The reign of Sonni 'Alī was marked by the bringing into line of Timbuktu, by the supremacy of Gao and, in a sense, by the backlash of African traditional religion against Islam. The *coup d'état* of 1493 organized by Askīya Muḥammad and the desire to make the 'Islamic option' irreversible can be explained only in this context.

The end of the sixteenth century was marked by the Moroccan conquest. The collapse of the political framework and the disorganization of the social fabric led to a definitive decline of the Songhay cities. Resistance to the occupying Moroccan forces over the course of some ten years brought about a southwards movement of populations, mainly into Dendi. These populations organized themselves as little independent states with socio-religious structures drawn from the ancestral traditions, and kept nothing of Islam except their names.

Still more significant than this retreat is the social and religious disarray in the political vacuum created by the disappearance of the Songhay state and the disorders of the Moroccan occupation, the emergence of an 'animistic' kingdom ostensibly professing allegiance to African values. This was the Banmana (Bambara) kingdom of Segou during the seventeenth century. This was caused both by the destruction of the 'imperial Muslim power' and by the decline in the urban fabric of the empire.

Islamic contact with Africa proved to be one of the most fruitful human ventures

in world history. Islam offered what might be termed 'a choice of society'. Its implications were variously conceived at different times and in different places in the black continent. The stakes were high: neither more nor less than a change in outlook, in ways of conceiving and representing the world, in behaviour. It was a matter of exchanging one's own culture for that of another – in short of becoming someone else. In spite of the initial resistance, Mediterranean Africa accepted the Muslim option. It was Islamized and started to become Arabized.

In the rest of Africa, Islam did not find the propitious historical circumstances which explain its total success in the east and north of the continent and in Spain. Although it was neither a conqueror nor totally in control of power – which it had to leave in the hands of princes who were still imbued with African traditions – Islam obtained substantial religious results south of the desert and in East Africa. By the sixteenth century, Islam had still not found an overall solution which would enable it to integrate black societies and their cultures without problems in the House of Islam. The subsequent interlude was not any more conducive to the discovery of such a solution. Lastly, on more than one point, social integration was to occur in the course of revolutionary events in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; these events alone, in certain regions, were to make Islam into a comprehensive expression of the social and cultural life of the people.



The peoples of the Sudan: population movements

The problem and the sources

At the present stage of African historiography, study of the movements that culminated in the establishment of the peoples of the Sudan is an indispensable but extremely complex task.

In most books on African history, population movements occupy a prominent place and, since the vast area of the Sudan was conducive to movement, contacts and exchanges, there is a strong temptation to invoke outside influences. Use is often made of oral tradition in an attempt to establish a connection between the cultures of the peoples of the Sudan and the culture of certain prestigious ancestors.

The Hamitic theory, which served to explain the evolution of African cultures in ancient times, has been widely used as an interpretative framework: the Hamites were, according to this theory, an African people distinct from the other blacks racially and linguistically. Among the Hamites it included the inhabitants of the Sahara, the Berbers, the Tubu and the Fulani. Hamitic theory draws a sharp distinction between the pastoral Hamites and the agricultural blacks, considering them as two separate and well-defined categories. The Hamites are regarded as having been responsible for all the progress and innovations made in Africa. That being so, the occupation of pastoral cattle-breeder is credited with cultural superiority. It is said that these white nomads have transmitted the elements of 'civilization' to the sedentary blacks.

Authors like Delafosse, Palmer and Urvoy, who have provided much of our knowledge about the peoples of the Sudan, deliberately adopted this diffusionist standpoint. Contemporary African historiography is becoming sensitive to the ideological presuppositions inherent in such assumptions and these are now being subjected to methodical criticism, but interpretations of this type are still present in textbooks and other works. Although these theories and their influence are now being challenged in earnest, it is far harder to replace them with fresh contributions based on the results of research.

Another set of problems stems from the fact that we do not have enough material for an exhaustive treatment of this subject. The period between the seventh and the eleventh centuries usually comes under the heading of the 'dark ages' and, despite the recent expansion of African historical studies, the information we have for the early periods is still incomplete.

The integration of North Africa into the Arab-speaking civilization brought with it also an increase in more reliable information about sub-Saharan Africa. While we are indebted to Arab geographers and historians for their contribution to the knowledge of these regions, we cannot close our eyes to their limitations. None of the writers visited the Sudan before Ibn Baṭṭūṭa in the fourteenth century and most of them collected their information from hearsay at places far away from the countries they described. Their accounts are therefore fragmentary and, moreover, they reflect the cultural bias of Muslim intellectuals. Sometimes the authors amalgamated information from various periods into a single whole, thus confusing the chronological setting. Historians should be aware of these shortcomings and approach these written sources with healthy criticism. The collections of Arab sources by J.M. Cuoq (1975) and by N. Levtzion and J.F.P. Hopkins (1981) now offer accessible works of reference and the study of Arab sources can still yield valuable insights into the history of the Sudan.

Oral tradition is another important field of study. The Wagadu legends, accounts by chroniclers and traditionists from Mali and Mande land, the Songhay, Zarma, Hausa, Fulani and Mossi traditions, together with the archaeological work being carried out from Mauritania to Chad, make it possible to view the subject in a more critical light and widen the field of information.

The area in question is enormous. The 'Land of the Blacks' – Bilād al-Sudān – comprises not only the Senegal, Niger and Chad basins but also the savanna and forest lands further south. Here documentary material is even scantier. Work is in progress at Kong (Ivory Coast), Begho (Ghana) and Poura (Upper Volta) but, apart from Taruga and Ife in Nigeria, these sites cannot compare with what has been achieved at Tishit, Tegdaoust and Kumbi Saleh, or in the Dogon country. This wealth of investigation in the Sahel in fact provides valuable material for a reassessment of the Sudan's relationship with its Saharan fringes. This in turn makes it possible to see under what conditions the peoples of the Sudan occupied their environment, and how they fitted into it and acquired their cultural resources.

The northern border

We have long been accustomed to looking at the sub-Sahara through what may be called 'the spectacles of Islam', that is, seeing its history exclusively through the eyes of Muslim society settled in North Africa, which is our main source of written literature.

The tendency to place the starting-point of the 'Land of the Blacks' concept in North Africa goes back a very long way. It originated in antiquity, when the 'known world' around the Mediterranean basin was the geographical centre of the world. This structure did not change fundamentally during the Islamic period. The result is an imbalance between a plethora of writings about ancient and medieval trans-Saharan traffic, on the one hand, and the very incomplete knowledge of the black peoples during the same period, on the other.

Saharans and Berbers played an important role in West Africa from the point of view of population movements. Since prehistorical times they were constantly active in the

Sahara, as far as its southern edges. Their ancestors from the Fazzān, the Garamantes, were active intermediaries between *Provincia Africa* and the Land of the Blacks during the Roman period.

Their way of life was mainly nomadic, which afforded them considerable mobility and a better chance of coming into contact with the south, thanks particularly to their use of camels. This accounts for the Berbers' independent attitude to successive hegemonies in North Africa, from the Carthaginians to the Muslim conquest. Berber opposition to the new Arab power expressed itself in various resistance movements, but especially in the favourable reception given to the *Khāridjite* heresy.¹

Among the Saharan Berber groups, the Tuareg – the name by which they would later become known to us – occupied a special position. Their area was relatively near the Land of the Blacks. They formed a number of confederations and occupied a territory extending from the *Ghadāmēs* area to the Niger and beyond, their main settlements being in the massifs of Hoggar, Aïr and the *Adrār des Ifoghas*. Despite adherence to the Muslim religion, they managed to preserve fundamental aspects of their culture, such as their language, *tamashegh*, their script, *tifinaḡh*, and their social structure with warrior, religious, tributary, slave and craftsman classes. In their accounts of their origins, they claim an ancestry which also indicates an undoubted cultural identity. According to their oral traditions, the Tuareg are descended from Tin Hinan, a woman from the *Tafilālet*. Excavations carried out in 1929 and 1933 in a funeral monument at Abalessa, west of the Hoggar, seem to confirm these traditions. They brought to light a large quantity of objects dating from the fourth century of the Christian era, which also suggests the existence of an old route between southern Morocco and the Hoggar at a time when camels were in use.

In anthropological terms the Tuareg, in fact, represent a half-way house between the Sahara and the Sudan. They fall into two groups: those who live in the *Tassili-n-Ajjer* and the Hoggar in the north, and the southern branch, the *Awellimid* and the *Kel Wi* of Aïr, who have intermarried with the black Hausa peoples. In these circumstances, the black peoples have exerted some cultural influence on the Tuareg. The Tuareg practise a type of divination called *tachchelt* ('the viper'), in which the reptile is questioned according to certain forms of words. The snake also appears in many other circumstances, its meaning being ambiguous: it has a protective function, but it appears in dreams as a harbinger of ill-fortune. Comparison with a similar legend reported by al-Bakrī and attributed to the *Zāfḡāwa* people of the Sudan suggests cultural contacts between the Tuareg and Ghana.

There are black peoples in the central Sahara, particularly in the west. The latter, the *Harātīn*, usually form part of the population of the oases of southern Morocco and Mauritania. The question of their origin is still debatable: they have been called black Berbers. New approaches to the ancient peopling of the Sahara throw a different light on the issue. There are plausible indications that they are living specimens of black peoples whose southward movement goes back a very long way.

1. See Chapters 3 and 10 of this volume.



5.1 West Africa in the eleventh century. (F. de Medeiros)

The movements in the Sahel

We shall try first to demarcate the area within which African societies organized and structured themselves during the period concerned. For this purpose, it is necessary to use the findings of work based on the latest research techniques, such as palaeoecology, palynology and archaeology. By combining their contributions with more easily available data from oral tradition and the Arabic sources, it may be possible to arrive at a number of valid hypotheses. The work done in Mauritania on Saharan prehistory and later periods will serve as an example. In this respect the Adrār, Tāgant and Awkār areas stand out. They are directly concerned with the western sector of the Land of the Blacks and hold out promising prospects for the understanding of groups as representative as the Fulani and the inhabitants of Ghana. It is now established that the population map of the neolithic Sahara was perceptibly different from the situation following the climatic change, and there are plausible pointers to the existence of a sedentary majority black population. The first millennium of the Christian era may have been characterized by the continued existence of black peasant communities as well as entrenched cores among Libyco-Berber and then Berber nomads. Pressure from the latter set off a gradual southward movement, i.e. towards the habitat which the black peoples have largely retained.

The Fulani inhabit a very large area of the West African savanna, and their presence in several regions between Senegal and Cameroon lends importance to the question of their provenance and the various stages of their journeyings. Their way of life makes them seem marginal in relation to other groups, and this tends to make the latter think that the Fulani are essentially unstable and are always 'migrating'. This largely explains why diffusionist speculation regarded the Fulani as being fertile ground on which to deploy a variety of Hamitic theories. The cradle of the Fulani has been sought in all sorts of areas, both inside and outside Africa: their ancestors were perhaps the Berbers, perhaps the Nubians or, according to Delafosse, Judaeo-Syrians.

All these theories share the presupposition that the formation of the great states of the Sudan is primarily due to outside factors contributed by pastoral peoples such as the Fulani. Current studies tend to agree that the Fulani phenomenon belongs within the West African context and forms an integral part of its human geography, its historical development and its culture. From the linguistic point of view, Fulfulde has an undoubtedly African substratum showing similarities to Wolof and Serer. As regards their provenance, the evidence points to southern Mauritania, where the Fulani were at the beginning of the Christian era. Striking resemblances to and influences of Fulfulde have been found in the toponyms of the Brakna and Tāgant areas of Mauritania. All this suggests that the Fulani are descended from the cattle rearers attested in Mauritania in the third and second millennia before the Christian era. In the period that concerns us, they moved towards the Senegal valley, and played a part in the formation of some states, such as Takrūr. The Fulani presence in West Africa is especially evident in Futa Toro in the eleventh century, although they are not explicitly mentioned in the Arabic sources before al-Maḳrīzī and the *Chronicle of Kano* (fourteenth-fifteenth century).

Something should be said at this point about the ethnonyms *Fulani* and *Tukuloor*

(Toucouleur): the Fulani call themselves Pullo (in the singular) and Fulbe (in the plural). Those who speak their language – *Pular* or *Fulfulde* – are called *Hal-pularen*. The latter is also the term used by the inhabitants of Futa Toro whom European sources refer to as the Tukuloor. Scholars of the colonial period began calling the herdsmen the Fulbe (Fulani) proper, while for the sedentary people speaking the same language they suggested the name *Tukuloor*, regarding them as a different ethnic group. Although the two groups have different customs, the differences are due to socio-economic factors and have nothing to do with ethnic, linguistic or cultural considerations. It is an irony of fate that in the region which was the point of departure of the migrations of the Fulbe towards the east, that is, the Senegal valley (Futa Toro), the Fulbe should be called by a name that is alien to them.

It is today almost unanimously recognized that, in historical times, the Fulani came from the Senegal Futa and that this Senegalese group, the neighbours of their close relatives, the Sereer and the Wolof, should be regarded as the nucleus from which other groups whose language was *Pular* or *Fulfulde* spread out and emigrated towards the east and the south.

The question of the origin and movements of the Fulani is crucial to the history of the peoples of West Africa, for it affects all groups in western and central Sudan. However, other aspects of the Fulani's relations with these groups, especially the Wolof, the Sereer, the Soninke and the Mand, and also with the ancient kingdom of Ghana need to be further investigated. The foundation of Ghana, like the origin of the Fulani, has been interpreted in diffusionist terms, based on the accounts of the authors of the *ta'rikhs*; Delafosse attributes to Ghana Syro-Palestinian founders who came to the Soninke of Awkār from Cyrenaica. These foreigners were supposedly the ancestors of the Fulani as well, and were said to have set up the powerful state of Ghana in the third century of the Christian era. Towards the end of the eighth century, Soninke blacks, with Kaya Maghan Cissé as their first king (*tunka*), are reported to have driven the whites back towards Tāgant, Gorgol and the Futa.

It now seems established that the neolithic population of the Sahara was quite dominated by blacks, traces of whom can be found as far as the Adrār. Following the change to a drier climate, the white population (the Libyco-Berbers) moved southwards, but came up against organized black peasants like those of Dhār Tishit, the ancestors of the Soninke of Ghana. The defensive sites of Dhār Tishit show that the blacks were indeed organized to resist the pressure of the nomads. Given these factors, it seems likely that the foundation of an organized state like Ghana dates back to the first millennium before the Christian era and it is not impossible that the Chebka phase between 1000 and 900 before the Christian era is a credible hypothesis.

Hypotheses about the black population of Ghana and its initial habitat in the neolithic Sahara in an area further north than modern Ghana are not purely arbitrary, especially since the persistence of 'residual' elements right from the Arab period to our own times greatly adds to their plausibility. Arab texts and oral traditions show that the blacks in historical times inhabited an area much further north than they do today. They controlled the Tāgant, Awkār, Hōdh (Hawḍ), Tiris and Adrār areas. Analysis of these texts and traditions makes it possible to situate the Soninke in Tāgant and Hōdh and the ancestors of the Sereer and Fulani in other parts of present-day

Mauritania. The two last-mentioned groups had earlier lived together in southern Mauritania and afterwards in Futa Toro. Whereas the Fulani remained in the Senegal valley, the Sereer moved further south towards the territory they now occupy in Sine and Salum.

Undue emphasis has often been placed on the divisions and fierce, unrelenting and merciless struggles between the Berber nomads and the sedentary black peoples. While there is no denying the fact that these two groups clashed with one another, it should not be forgotten that the necessities of economic and political life led them to live and co-operate very closely together. That is why it is no longer valid to interpret the relations between the whites and blacks of the Sahel solely in terms of racial and religious confrontation.

It is not sufficient to attribute the dispersion of the Soninke solely to the pressure exerted by the Berbers, and especially the Almoravids; there were many other factors, the foremost being the climatic factor. Their original habitat – the Wagadu of Soninke legend – was situated in a region of unstable climate but well placed from the commercial standpoint. The Wagadu legend tells us that the people of Wagadu fled south after a drought that was to last seven years. This climatic disaster, which is reminiscent of the drought of the 1970s, seems to have been the primary reason for the dispersion of the Soninke. Their migrations took them everywhere in the western Sudan, from Gambia as far as Songhay, but one very large group remained behind in their initial habitat in Awkār and Hōdh, where they established their first state, the ancient Ghana. The migrations of the Soninke extended over several centuries.

The emergence of the Sudanese hegemonies: the example of Ghana

During the first millennium of the Christian era, a succession of organized societies appeared in central and western Sudan and developed into veritable states. Some like Kānem or Ghana became very powerful; other less extensive states like those of the Hausa, the Songhay and the Tākūr were in the process of formation. When the Muslims arrived in the Sudan during the first centuries of Islam, they found themselves in the presence of these groups and had to come to terms with them.

While there are still gaps in our knowledge as to the stages in the formation of these states, we can trace them in broad outline by focusing on the groups that formed Ghana and Kānem.²

The Ghanaian empire was built up on a very broad ethnic base: the great Mande family extended from the southern forest land to the Sahel adjoining the Sahara. The kingdom of Ghana was located in the northern part, peopled by Soninke who were in contact with the white nomads of the Sahara. Oral traditions collected at Timbuktu some thousand years after the founding of Ghana relate that the first ruling dynasty of that country was white.

The frequency with which the oral traditions originating in Sudanese societies themselves attribute their origin to white ancestors might seem surprising and raises

2. On the beginning of Kānem, see Chapter 15 of this volume.

the question of the origin of state structures in the Sudan. However, the late date of these accounts and the situation of black societies that produced them provide some answer to the question: those accounts simply project into the past facts that were contemporary with those later societies.

There is a widespread tendency among the Muslims to link the ruling classes or dynasty to the Prophet, or his entourage, and thereby give legal sanction to their power. However, Arab authors before the middle of the twelfth century make no mention of the white origin of the dynasties that ruled the Sudanese states, be it Ghana, Takrūr or Songhay. Al-Bakrī, who provides most information on Ghana of the eleventh century, dispels all doubt on this question: Ghana was ruled by a black king adept in the traditional African religion. It was not until al-Idrīsī that the theme of white origins was developed; this theme accordingly falls into the context of the growing expansion of Islam in the Sudan.

The states of the Sudan were the specific creations of the black peoples. They maintained complex relations with their neighbours of Berber origin. Certainly the black farmers initially withdrew under the pressure of the nomadic herdsmen and settled in the less rigorous areas of the Sahel, but they later organized themselves so as to be able better to resist such pressure. The Sudanese found within themselves the political and social resources necessary to face up to the threats coming from the north. While the powerful empire of Ghana at the height of its power (eleventh century) coexisted with the Berber state of Awdāghust, it was later subjected to attacks by the Almoravids. Even if a state of tension existed between the Berbers and the black peoples, it did not result in the Berbers taking over the Sudanese states, since the latter had built up a solid organization.

The coming into being and development of the states of the Sudan in the period under review were based on the use of certain instruments and techniques which made it possible for those who possessed them to impose their rule on the small groups of farmers and herdsmen of the Sahel. Two factors seem to have played a decisive role in this regard: the possession of iron and the use of horses and camels.

Some studies about metals in black Africa have pointed out the connection between iron and the formation of the large Sudanese states. Apart from the importance iron has for hunting and farming, it is a factor of military strength, ensuring the technical superiority of the possessor over others. As far as the Sudan is concerned, the role of the army was decisive in the formation of states like those of Kānem or Ghana. Increasing interest is being shown in oral tradition having to do with iron and blacksmiths, who form a category of persons holding power in a variety of ways.

As has often been suggested, there is a close connection between iron and use of the horse because both are linked to the formation of the large states of the Sudan. There were known to be horses in the Sahara during the second half of the second millennium and the first centuries of the last millennium before the Christian era. However, they followed population movements, the Barbary horse also being found in the Maghrib and the Dongola in the south-east. The Barbary horse was used in West Africa in Hōdh and the Sahel as far as Jerma. However, from the outset of the Christian era, the horse was replaced by the camel, an animal more resistant to the rigours of the desert, for trans-Saharan communications. The latter played a considerable role in the

establishment of Sudanese domination from Takrūr as far as Kānem.³

Much work has been done on trade between the peoples of the Sudan and their partners to the north, to the detriment of the domestic trade within the black communities themselves. This is even more true of the relationships between the great Sahel states and the countries of the savanna and the forest. Nevertheless, we can analyse the position of the black states in the balance of power created by contact between the Berber and Maghribi peoples and the blacks of the Sudan through their trans-Saharan relations. The prevailing impression is that this involved the massive exploitation of the countries of sub-Saharan Africa by better equipped northern states.

The question that arises is how the states of the Sudan behaved in this situation, having regard to the manifold circumstances that favoured the people of the north and the consequent imbalance in their favour. The activities of the black states can be observed at three levels: the growth of their power, real control of the sector under authority, and their adoption of a policy suited to the interests of their people.

Al-Bakrī's descriptions of the kings of Ghana and Kāw-Kāw (Gao) give a series of details which show how the monarchy in both kingdoms was aggrandized to prompt the veneration of the people. The king of Ghana was distinguished by ritual apparel: only he and the heir apparent could wear sewn clothes, and he also wore a gilded cap and a turban, necklaces and bracelets. The king held audience to dispense justice in the setting of an impressive ceremonial, with strict etiquette described in minute detail by al-Bakrī. The latter mentions a practice of extreme importance because of its religious implications: the king's subjects prostrated themselves at his approach and threw earth on to their heads. Lastly, the grandiose ceremonies marking the king's funeral are described: the typically African custom of burying servants with the sovereign, the sacrifices and libations offered to him, the sacred woods that sheltered the tombs of the kings and their inviolable character – all this helped to make the monarchy a sacred institution worthy of reverence.

In the case of the king of Kāw-Kāw (Gao), al-Bakrī relates that his meal was accompanied by a special ritual: women dancing to the sound of drums, all business in town suspended during the meal, and the public announcement of the end of the royal meal by shouts and yells.

Royalty of a sacred character seems to have been a specific feature of the culture of the great black states of the Sudan, at least during the Islamic period.⁴ This institution stands out as something indigenous; it is significant that the Arab geographers do not, for instance, describe the position of an Islamized ruler like the ruler of Takrūr. Such an institution can also be regarded in the hands of these societies as an effective instrument for governing their states, especially in the case of kingdoms exerting hegemony over a very wide area, like Gao and Ghana.

While the kings of the Sudan had authority and power within their states, which they governed firmly by means of a suitable institution, external relations were not completely outside their scope. Ghana's relations with the Berbers who reigned at Awdāghust from its foundation by the Lamtūna in the ninth century can be interpreted

3. See Chapter 14 of this volume.

4. On the 'sacred' kingship, see Chapter 28 of this volume.

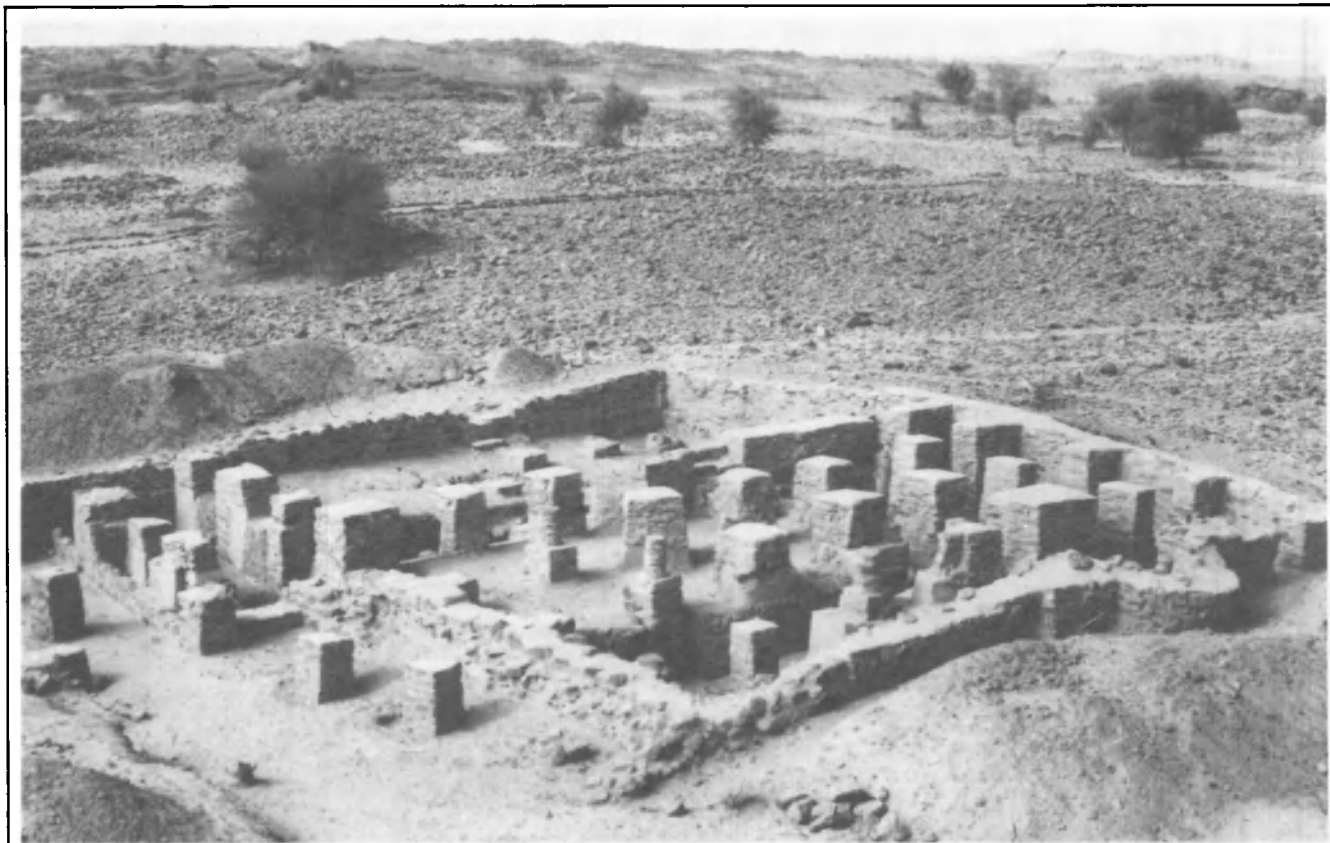
in that light. The rulers of Ghana extended their frontiers in all directions from the late eighth century onwards. The existence of a Berber trading centre at the extreme southern edge of the desert could be conducive to trade with the north, and from this point of view the town of Awdāghust would have had a *raison d'être*. All the same, these traders' role had to be within limits compatible with Ghana's sovereignty. It was enough for them to be brokers and intermediaries in a traffic whose real southern terminus must have been Ghana. Escalation of their claims and the strengthening of Berber power at Awdāghust could represent a threat to the state of Ghana, which reached the height of its power in the tenth and eleventh centuries. This accounts for the conquest of Awdāghust at the end of the tenth century and the installation of a Soninke governor. Soninke management seems to have fulfilled its purpose very efficiently, for the blacks were to keep control of the situation at Awdāghust until the Almoravids destroyed it in 1055.

Control of the political situation was inseparable from a real Soninke stranglehold over the entire economic sector in the area under their jurisdiction. One of the necessary conditions for this power was the availability of information about the sources of their prosperity. The rulers of Ghana exerted strict and effective control in this important domain, especially as regards the provenance of gold and how it was acquired.

The ruler of Ghana, in his efforts to control the sources of commercial transactions south of the Sahara, pursued an intelligent policy: he levied a withholding tax when goods were brought into or taken out of his territory. Traders had to pay twice on salt: one dinar on bringing it in and two dinars on taking it out. Ghana was thus the hub for the distribution of salt, a vital product in sub-Saharan Africa. According to al-Bakrī the ruler of Ghana kept all nuggets extracted for himself, so as to avoid a slump in the price of gold. With his clear understanding of the economic mechanisms of which Ghana was the hub, he was intent on keeping the monopoly of a product as vital as gold. Thus the black world organized its trading economy to withstand the power of the salt producers, salt being exchanged for gold.

This being so, it is hardly likely that trade and the whole system of economic exchanges it entailed were introduced to Ghana's blacks by the Berbers, as has sometimes been suggested. The latter are supposed to have contributed not only the idea but also the techniques of this trade (including the slave-trade), and to have brought about the birth of the state of Ghana. The control exercised by the sultan's rulers over their own commercial sector completely rules out such a hypothesis.

The kings of the Sudan showed great political skill in their relations with the Muslim world and with the culture of all the northern partners with whom they had dealings. They used to their own advantage the abilities of the Muslims who frequented their states. According to al-Bakrī, the king of Ghana chose his interpreters, treasurer and ministers from among the Muslims. Thus, by entrusting some sectors of his administration to educated Muslims, he expected some measure of efficiency from it. In return, he tried to create favourable conditions for the practice of their religion. Ghana, like Gao, had a town next to the king's town in which the Muslims lived, with twelve mosques all with their imāms, muezzins and lecturers. Lawyers and scholars also lived in this town. Muslims were, moreover, not obliged to comply with customs inconsistent with their religious convictions.



5.2 The mosque of Tegdaoust/Awdāghust, after excavation and conservation work on the walls. The *ḵibla* wall faces south-south-west. (IMRS (Institut mauritanien de la recherche scientifique), Nouakchott)

The ruler of Gao was normally required to be a Muslim. In addition, the attributes of royal authority handed over to him at his investiture comprised, besides the seal, the sword and the Quran, 'supposedly', according to al-Bakrī, 'the gifts sent by the Emir of believers'. However, the fact that both sovereigns governed peoples who freely practised traditional religions raises the problem of the Sudan's relations with the Muslim world in this initial period of Islamization.⁵

Conclusion

The study of population movements entails first and foremost a rigorously critical reappraisal of the widespread notions about the 'migrations' of the black peoples over very long distances. The movements of the peoples of the Sudan before the eleventh century bore no resemblance to anarchic movements over enormous areas.

The blacks, who constituted the predominant population of the Sahara, had to withdraw southwards into the Sahel to look for favourable agricultural conditions. They abandoned their lands to groups of specialized nomadic herdsmen who were able to adapt themselves to the new conditions. The immigrants found in the Sahel other groups of blacks with whom they aligned themselves in order to face the threats coming from the north. This gave impetus to the gradual development of socio-political units of varying size which extended from Kānem in the east to Takrūr in the west during the period preceding the arrival of Islam in the Sudan.

When the Muslims arrived in the Sudan, they found themselves in the presence of a series of states, some of them fully established, others still in the process of formation. The powerful Soninke kingdom of Ghana dominated the extended Mande group in the region between Senegal and Niger while the nucleus of what was to become the Songhay kingdom took shape in the eastern part of the loop of the Niger. That kingdom controlled the river traffic as well as the route linking Niger to North Africa via the Adrār des Ifoghas and the Hoggar.

The period from the eighth century to the eleventh century was decisive for the peoples of the Sudan. Because of the sound organization and powerfully centralized structure of their monarchy, they were able to realize the importance of trade with Mediterranean and Saharan Africa. However, their constant concern was to retain control over the transactions, so as to prevent the Saharan intermediaries from gaining a stranglehold on trade and the sources of their prosperity. Perceiving the cultural and economic advantages to be gained from the presence of their northern partners, they adopted a sufficiently tolerant attitude towards their religious demands and even went so far as to become converted to Islam while remaining rooted in their own religious traditions. In so doing, the Sudanese leaders, and above all those of Ghana, were able to withstand the competition of their neighbours, the Ṣanhādja, who were part of the Almoravid movement in the eleventh century. That prevented their complete decline, despite the Almoravid onslaught and a temporary eclipse. The black states accordingly succeeded in safeguarding their personality and secured the foundations of a lasting civilization whose subsequent development found expression in Mali, the Songhay empire and the city states of the Hausa.

5. See Chapters 3 and 4 of this volume.



The Bantu-speaking peoples and their expansion

The Bantu family of languages

Almost all the peoples occupying the southern third of the African continent, from the Cameroon–Nigerian seaboard in the west to the Somalia–Kenyan coastline in the east and southwards as far as Port Elizabeth, speak a closely related group of languages known as the Bantu languages.

The Bantu family consists of over four hundred languages all deriving from the same ancestral language known as ‘proto-Bantu’. This is a fact that has been established beyond doubt on the basis of lexical and grammatical resemblances which cannot be accounted for by mere chance or by borrowings. A common parentage must be assumed. Take, for instance, the word meaning ‘people’ in the following languages:

Duala: <i>bato</i>	Mongo: <i>banto</i>	Rwanda: <i>abantu</i>
Fang: <i>bot</i>	Bushong: <i>baat</i>	Shona: <i>vanhu</i>
Tio: <i>baaru</i>	Luba: <i>bantu</i>	Herero: <i>abandu</i>
Kongo: <i>bantu</i>		

It can be seen that all these words derive from the form made up of the root * *-ntu* and the prefix * *ba-*, denoting the plural. In addition, the differences between languages are regular, as may be gathered from other comparisons. Analogies are also to be found in the entire grammatical system of the Bantu languages. In the above example, the prefix governs the grammatical agreements and belongs itself to a specific class of prefixes. The corresponding singular prefix is * *mu-* which, combined with the root, forms the word meaning ‘person’. The system of agreements, the formation of adjectives, all kinds of pronouns, prefixes and infixes and the way these elements function are all as alike in the Bantu languages as is the grammatical structure of the Romance languages deriving from Latin. All the evidence, therefore, bears out the fact that more than four hundred languages spread over one-third of Africa have their origins in a single ancestral language. The historical implications of such a vast phenomenon are clear.

Origins and subdivisions of the Bantu languages

The above-mentioned phenomenon certainly did not pass unnoticed and, indeed, the first Portuguese navigators were already surprised at the linguistic bonds linking the inhabitants of the kingdom of the Congo and those of the East African coast.

Since Wilhelm Bleek first identified the speakers of Bantu as a group in 1862, dubbing the family 'Bantu' because of the structure of the word meaning 'people', scholars have been intrigued by the Bantu question and have tried to account for the origins and movements of the Bantu-speaking peoples. H. H. Johnston's study, published between 1919 and 1922, was the first attempt to locate the origins of the Bantu and plot the stages of their dispersal. He located the ancestors of the Bantu in the Baḥr al-Ghazāl, not far from the Baḥr al-Jebel, to the east of Kordofān in the north, or in the Benue and Chad basins in the west, their first movement being eastwards towards Mount Elgon and from there to the shores of Lake Victoria, Tanzania and the Zaïrean forest, with the first large-scale incursion into central and southern Africa beginning around 300 before the Christian era.

Two major theories have recently been put forward by linguists to account for the origins of the Bantu-speaking peoples. Joseph Greenberg thought they must have originated in the area of greatest Bantu language divergence and, following this theory, he traced their origins to the middle Benue region of Nigeria.

This conclusion was rejected by the influential Bantuist Malcolm Guthrie, but is now accepted as accurate by all linguists. In Guthrie's view, the most likely location for the birthplace of 'proto-Bantu' was in the area of greatest Bantu language convergence, around the watershed of the Congo and Zambezi rivers, with a nucleus in the Shaba province of Zaïre.

Since 1973, three groups of linguists working independently have proved that Guthrie was wrong. All three adopt a similar approach (based on studies of vocabulary) but they do not use the same data.

The fact that the Bantu languages originated in the west has therefore been established. In the comparative approach to historical linguistics, the primary task is to construct a genealogical tree in which the ancestor of the family is the direct antecedent of the ancestors of subgroups, which are themselves the forerunners of the ancestors of language subgroups, etc. So far, nobody has proposed a genealogical subdivision of the Bantu group of languages based on evidence solid enough to be acceptable. The reason is what is known among linguists as 'phenomena of convergence', that is to say massive borrowings among Bantu languages from the time of their common ancestor up to the present day. This circumstance is itself of cardinal importance to historians, since it proves that various Bantu-speaking groups have remained constantly in close contact with their neighbours and have never been really isolated from one another.

It is now generally agreed among linguists that there are two major blocs of Bantu languages, the western bloc located principally in the equatorial forest regions and the eastern bloc extending from Uganda to the Cape. The languages belonging to the eastern group are more closely related to each other than those of the western group. This implies that the expansion of the eastern group began at a later stage and occurred



6.1 Bantu expansion. (J. Vansina)

more rapidly than that of the western group. At the other end of the time-scale, it is generally agreed that a number of small genetic groupings have their roots in the relatively recent linguistic past, for instance a Kongo genetic group and a genetic language group from the region of the Great Lakes.

As early as 1948, Guthrie began to apply a 'practical' system of classification, grouping blocs of geographically contiguous languages in zones 'of resemblance', based on comparisons of existing data. These categories were only provisional and intended for practical purposes, but they proved so useful that they are still frequently employed today. Each zone is assigned a letter between A and T, followed by a figure for each smaller grouping and a second figure standing for the language itself. Thus, A70 refers to the so-called 'Pahouin' group of languages and A74 denotes the Fang language.

At first glance, this classification system appears to have no historical value, a fact that is borne out by increasingly elaborate attempts to devise a reliable system of historical classification. Even the subgroups designated by figures cannot always be compared, and the categories do not have the value of historical proof.

The drawbacks of applying a system having no historical validity are enormous and linguists are reluctant to use a system of notation or terminology based on genetic data until the subdivisions of the Bantu family have been established beyond doubt.

The data currently available cover only about half of all Bantu languages, whereas, in order to draw authoritative conclusions, the least that is required is correct linguistic notation, a more extensive vocabulary and an outline of the grammatical structure of each language. If these conditions were fulfilled, it would be possible to proceed with confidence. Thus the basic requirements for really definitive work are a comprehensive set of dictionaries and grammars, but the bulk of the linguistic heritage of the Bantu-speaking peoples has not yet been recorded.

Linguistics and history

It is an undeniable fact that linguistic data have historical implications. The phenomenon of a single family of languages spread over such a wide area must have some significance beyond what meets the eye. All authors have assumed that the language in question spread as a result of the migration of their speakers. There is also a tendency to juxtapose or even confuse language, culture and race.

Although in the beginning there was a Bantu community, speaking the proto-Bantu language, belonging to a specific race with a characteristic way of life, the matter is still not entirely clear because data indicate that, while the community's main occupation was fishing, some of its subgroups probably lived by farming instead. In addition, languages are our only source of information concerning the proto-Bantu culture.

The other assumption, concerning the spread of the family of languages by migration, is not as watertight as it seems. The Romance languages, for example, did not spread through massive migration of the inhabitants of Latium. A whole range of socio-linguistic mechanisms exists which can lead to changes in the geographic location of languages, one of the most important being a change of language. A people may learn a foreign language, become perfectly bilingual and then abandon its own language for the foreign one. This is what happened in the case of the Sekyani of Gabon, who

are now all bilingual in Mpongwe and are beginning to lose their original language. The same is true of the inhabitants of the western Cape and southern Namibia, who lost the Khoi and San languages and now speak only Afrikaans. These changes are brought about by socio-cultural power relationships. Demographic processes also play a role. The Norman conquerors of England lost the use of the French language, having been assimilated by their more numerous subjects. Commercial or cultural predominance may also influence developments. The Sekyani adopted Mpongwe because it was the language of trade. In conclusion, it may be noted that quite frequently commercial, socio-political and even religious links may engender new common languages, derived from a language invested with prestige, for instance the Koinés, the Creoles and the Sabirs. Judging by the massive scale of convergence phenomena among the Bantu languages, this type of situation must have arisen more than once. In the comparatively recent past, mention may be made of Lingala, Swahili or Monokituba as trading languages belonging to the Creole category.

To obtain a more accurate explanation for the expansion of the Bantu languages, historians must proceed by analogy and bear constantly in mind the whole range of socio-linguistic mechanisms involved. They cannot automatically ascribe everything to migration. In any case, given the population density prior to our own era, it is misguided to speak in terms of massive population movements. Local demographic superiority or social, economic, cultural or political advantages are far more likely to shed light on the phenomenon. The history of the spread of the Bantu languages is so long and the area affected so vast that it must be assumed that at one time or another the majority if not all of the factors known to us by analogy could have played a role.

The linguistic data are of direct use in only one respect, namely reconstitution of the proto-Bantu community on the basis of what its vocabulary reveals. The Bantu vocabulary utilizable today refers to the Bantu group as narrowly defined, i.e. the 'common Bantu' closest to us in time. Although it is easy to reconstruct the vocabulary in terms of form, the same is not always true of meaning, since meaning changes over time and may now vary considerably from language to language. For instance, the root * *kùmù* means 'healer' or even 'diviner' in the east and 'chief' in the west and in one western bloc of languages (the A70s) it means 'one who is rich'. Of course, the meanings can be linked and we may envisage the proto-Bantu chief as being rich, a healer and a diviner. But the result may prove somewhat artificial. In this case, we have to opt for the meaning 'leader', which is correct but rather vague.

It may, however, be deduced from the old vocabulary that the community which spoke the ancestral Bantu language cultivated the yam, certain other roots and even cereals. The goat was the only domestic animal known. The community hunted (especially the wart-hog), but their speciality was fishing. Kinship was a major principle in internal organization and the community had its specialists, leaders and religious experts. The notion of ancestry and belief in sorcery were well established. Some idea can even be formed of the attitude of groups of wife-givers to wife-receivers.

The vocabulary, correlated with archaeological data and a knowledge of the geographical origins of the community, enables us to provide a date for the beginning of the Bantu expansion. We are dealing with a Stone Age community that engaged in agricultural activities (cereal cultivation, for instance) but was not familiar with

metal-based technology. These clues enable us to narrow down proto-Bantu to the period between -1000 (or even earlier) and -400.

The expansion itself was an enormously long process, since even in the nineteenth century it was still not entirely completed in East Africa. The first Arab travellers nevertheless brought back Bantu words from Africa's east coast. Around the eighth century, therefore, Bantu-speaking communities had already settled on the shores of the Indian Ocean. It follows that the Bantu expansion covered not only a third of the continent but a time-span of two to three thousand years.

Linguistics and archaeology

The line followed by scholars is clear and is reflected in the way the beginnings of Bantu expansion were established. The vocabulary must be combed for information that can be confirmed by finds in the archaeological sites. Again, but less conclusively, archaeological evidence of large-scale migrations can be compared with what is known about the spread of the Bantu languages.

In theory, this should provide the answer, but the task of reconstituting the processes is neither an easy nor a rapid one. Some of the more obvious difficulties may be mentioned. An early Iron Age site may date from after the first movement of expansion of the Bantu languages, but that does not imply that, later on, only the Bantu-speaking peoples knew how to smelt iron. There is evidence in East Africa of the very rapid spread of a type of pottery dating from the early Iron Age, and, as the sites are all in the area of expansion of the eastern Bantu languages, this coincidence (and coincidence it is) has been taken as proof that these were the archaeological traces of the Bantu expansion. In the first place, however, very few finds have been made at excavations in other parts of Bantu-speaking Africa. Secondly, it is just as plausible to suggest that this rapid spread of iron was the work of ironsmiths and potters who perhaps represented only a tiny minority of the population in which they settled.

We must constantly bear in mind the fact that archaeology cannot prove what language was spoken by the people who made or used the pottery, cultivated the cereals or fashioned the objects in metal, stone or bone discovered on the sites. Linguistic and archaeological data may, on the other hand, be compared, and the more remarkable the correlation seems to be, the greater its value as evidence.

It suffices to note that the earliest sites of Bantu-speaking peoples are undoubtedly associated with tools classified as Neolithic and that the Iron Age sites in southern, central and eastern Africa may conceivably be associated with the traces left by speakers of Bantu languages.

The Bantu expansion

Two theories have been put forward to explain the Bantu expansion from their original homelands. Writing in 1962, the archaeologist Merrick Posnansky suggested that the migrations of the Bantu peoples from West Africa to central Africa involved agricultural communities and that the movement gathered momentum after the agricultural techniques (banana and yam cultivation) introduced by the Indonesians

between -400 and +200 spread to the forest peoples of central Africa. Another theory, based on the notion of conquest, establishes a link between the expansion of the Bantu and the beginnings of the Iron Age. The working of iron facilitated agricultural production by making tools more effective and enabled the Bantu to dominate the peoples in the areas where they settled. C.C. Wrigley claims that 'the Bantu were a dominant minority, specialized in hunting with the spear, constantly attracting new adherents . . . by their fabulous prestige as suppliers of meat, constantly throwing off new bands of migratory adventurers until the whole sub-continent was iron-using and Bantu-speaking'. Judging by the pattern of migration in the second part of the present millennium, other, probably more serious, reasons can be adduced: famine, search for more favourable living conditions in the form of better farming and grazing land, epidemics, wars and a sheer spirit of adventure could also have motivated the early Bantu movements, but these factors have hitherto received only scant attention.

Turning to the population explosion and conquest theories, it should be noted that the introduction of agriculture was a gradual process and did not immediately displace the earlier hunting and food-gathering economy in subequatorial Africa. Indeed, these two types of economy supplemented one another, as they still do in some parts of Africa up to the present day. The beginning of agriculture should not therefore be seen as a dramatic turning-point. It was an evolutionary process which could not immediately have caused a demographic revolution leading to mass emigration of the Bantu in search of more living space. The working of iron only gradually revolutionized agriculture because only small quantities of the metal were initially produced in Bantu Africa. Iron technology did not by any means revolutionize agriculture during the early Iron Age. Up to the beginning of the present century, most forest and bush clearing was done by fire, and the digging stick survived into the twentieth century in Africa. Iron technology undoubtedly improved the arsenals of the Bantu of that period, the iron-tipped spear and arrow being the most notable additions, but they were probably not regarded as more effective than stone or bone-tipped arrows and wooden spears and clubs, and did not make their possessors more aggressive.

The expansion of the Bantu was not a massive exodus from one area to another but rather a movement of small numbers of people from one village to the next and sometimes back again, a process that was repeated over and over until successive generations reached all parts of subequatorial Africa. Over thousands of years, movements must have occurred in all directions.

What can we therefore say today regarding the Bantu expansion? Proto-Bantu was spoken close to an ecological dividing-line in a comparatively rich environment. Migration of surplus population, at least on a small scale, probably occurred here. Its penetration of the forest was most probably a gradual process. The distribution of the north-western languages shows that they spread out in three main directions, first along the seacoast towards the south, and across the sea towards Malabo Island. During this first movement, they may even have reached the Gabon estuary. The second movement took the form of a thrust along the edge of the forest towards the east, at least as far as the Sangha. The third involved penetration of the forest from various points along its edge, either because of the normal advance of agriculture or

perhaps again through the activities of fishermen on the Sangha.

The first achievement of the Bantu was mastery of the Zaïre forest environment. The process of infiltration occurred in two phases:

- (1) from north to south, with the Bantu merely following the rivers and the narrow strips of alluvial land, and
- (2) the progressive destruction of the primary forest by the Bantu agricultural populations advancing on a broad front.

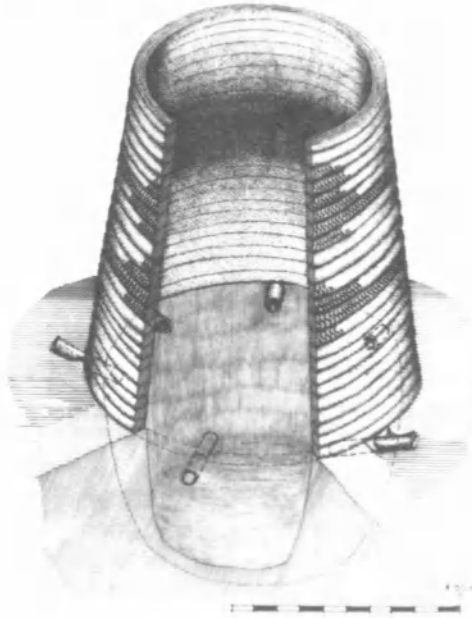
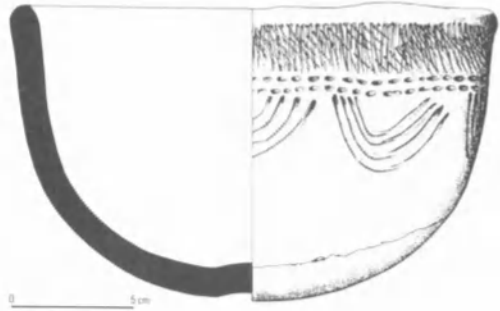
Not much is known about the early agricultural and metallurgical history of the western proto-Bantu region. It has been suggested that equatorial Zaïre was an independent centre of agricultural development, a development due to the great importance attached to yams and palm-oil. In Malabo Island, agricultural development based on palm-oil production began in the sixth century and agriculture in the wider equatorial region probably began at much the same time. It is believed that the Bantu cultivated yams and oil-palms but there is no direct evidence, since these activities leave little trace of their existence for the archaeologist.

There are two major early Iron Age traditions in Zaïre, the Kasai/Stanley Pool tradition and the Shaba/eastern Kivu tradition. In the western proto-Bantu region (that of the Kasai/Stanley Pool tradition), no stratified sites have so far been investigated, but it is reasonable to assume that the working of iron did not occur much earlier there than in the Shaba/eastern Kivu zone where radio-carbon dates in the fourth century were obtained for Shaba and in the first millennium of the Christian era for Kivu. While the stratified sites of Shaba give a clear date for the start of the Iron Age, those of Kivu do not, since comparable sites in Rwanda and Buhaya (Tanzania) have been assigned a much earlier date, around 300 to 500 years before the Christian era.

The agricultural innovations in the western proto-Bantu region started from within and encouraged population movements, although the equatorial environment does not facilitate such movements. Hence, up to the end of the first millennium of the Christian era, the western Bantu were probably the more stable of the two major Bantu groups. The Bantu were definitely using iron in the first millennium of the Christian era but they are unlikely to have developed its use to the point where an improvement in plantation agriculture generated a population explosion leading to expansion, or where warfare was revolutionized to the extent of encouraging the western Bantu to embark on military campaigns outside their own region.

Given the overall distribution of the Bantu language groups, there must have been a much stronger thrust eastwards, along the edge of the forest, carrying the predecessors of the eastern Bantu languages as far as the Great Lakes. This theory is neither borne out nor invalidated by other data. The only thing that is probable is the existence of the eastern group of languages. During this first stage, the expansion took place of the ancestors of other languages spoken by the western Bantu, especially the ancestor of the language bloc of the central forest towards the lands beyond Ubangi and Zaïre. Assuming that a direct advance was precluded by the existence of a huge swamp, either the northern route, to the north of Dongo, or the southern route, to the south of the mouth of the Sangha, must have been taken. The geographic distribution of the languages belonging to this bloc indicates that the southern route was chosen, and

6.2 Early Iron Age pottery (Urewe) found in the region of Kabuye, Rwanda. (F. Van Noten, 1983; drawing Y. Baele)



6.3 Reconstruction of an early Iron Age furnace in Rwanda: Nyaruhengeri I. (C. van Grunderbeek, E. Roche, H. Doutrelepon et P. Craddock, Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, Tervuren, Belgium)

the ancestral language may have been spoken between the Alima river and the forest, on the right bank of the Zaïre/Congo. Subsequently, these languages were carried to all parts of the forest by fishermen advancing along the rivers and by nomads wandering from village to village.

This region between the Alima and the forest contained a mixture of forest and savanna, similar to the area in which the proto-Bantu community has been located. But the languages advanced into sharply different environments, a development which could hardly have occurred without some interruption or at least deceleration in the movement of expansion. Gradually, for instance, some groups must have adapted to life in the savanna, where there was a lack of water, as is the case in the Bateke plateaux. In the east, on the other hand, there was an excess of water and some communities adjusted to swamp life. But the bulk of the languages were spoken by people who

preferred life in the forest, as either farmers or fishermen. Some other languages developed during this second stage in the south and south-west along the edge of the forest, and subsequently in lower Zaïre in a fresh mosaic of forest and savanna.

No trace of autochthonous languages remains in this part of the western Bantu language zone. The fact that they lived in villages gave the Bantu-speaking peoples an undeniable advantage over the less settled hunters and food-gatherers. The village became the centre of the surrounding territory and the influence of its language grew accordingly as the territory was reorganized. This fits in well with the theory of rapid propagation of languages by fishermen along the major rivers and the seacoast. These people were highly mobile and must have influenced the lives of the farming people all around them, either directly or through the trading of fish, pottery and sea-salt for the products of hunting or food-gathering. A look at the map enables us to say with certainty that the fishing communities were responsible for the high degree of linguistic homogeneity in the central basin because of their intensive contacts with the farmers. These contacts checked tendencies to linguistic divergence and favoured convergence.

Many later linguistic movements occurred in that area. In the north, especially between Ubangi and Zaïre, from Bangui to the Uele river, movements in different directions were discernible. In some cases, Bantu languages displaced other linguistic groups (for instance, the Mba-Mondunga group from Lisala to Kisangani); in others, they were overshadowed by the central Sudanese languages, especially in Ituri, where a large bloc of Bantu languages was, in addition, strongly influenced by the grammatical structure of those languages.

The linguist Christopher Ehret developed a theory to the effect that the Sudanese languages spread as far as Southern Africa but were assimilated by the subsequent expansion of the Bantu. In his view, the eastern proto-Bantu around the western shores of Lake Tanganyika evolved in three successive series of communities between — 600 and — 400, namely the Lega-Guha, who occupied eastern Zaïre to the west of the western Rift Valley system; the Lacustrine Bantu, who occupied the present territories of Rwanda, Burundi and western and southern Uganda; and the Tuli, who occupied a very extensive area in eastern, central and southern Africa. These Tuli were later to split into two groups, the Pela and the Pembele, the former including all speakers of Bantu dialects in Kenya and parts of Tanzania and the latter the Bantu-speaking peoples of most of Malawi, Mozambique, eastern Zambia and the whole of south-eastern Africa. By the end of the first millennium before the Christian era, these Pela and Pembele communities had emerged as different entities from their eastern proto-Bantu ancestors to the west of Lake Tanganyika and spread very rapidly during the first two or three centuries of the first millennium of the Christian era to eastern and southern Africa. The present Bantu-speaking peoples of these regions are their descendants.

No linguist has followed up Ehret's theory, doubtless because the evidence on which it is based is still too slender. Some of the available archaeological data bear out certain aspects of Ehret's theory, but no archaeological research on the early Iron Age has been conducted in the region to the west of Lake Tanganyika which, in his view, is the area from which the eastern proto-Bantu split up into different groups and hence we still do not understand how the Bantu languages came to predominate in eastern Africa. It was a completely new environment, the indigenous population was technically more

advanced than the Bantu-speaking groups and some of them doubtless spoke central Sudanese languages, at least in the north-western part of the region.

Archaeology tells us that metallurgy was already quite advanced in that area by the last centuries before the Christian era and that it spread from the Great Lakes to Transvaal and Natal in the first few centuries of that era. One is naturally tempted to conclude that it was technical superiority that enabled the Bantu languages to gain supremacy throughout the region. Towards the south, indeed, the advantage of technical superiority would also have included agriculture and animal husbandry. But at this point caution is indicated. Many languages in East Africa itself are so closely related that there is as yet no clear-cut system of subclassification, except for the languages to the south of the Zambezi. Besides, it has to be borne in mind that eastern Bantu languages are also spoken further to the west, in south-eastern Zaïre and in Zambia. And there is still some doubt regarding the position of the various languages from the south of lower Zaïre as far as Namibia. These languages were strongly influenced by the eastern Bantu languages, and the regions where they are spoken, in the rare cases in which they have been explored archaeologically, do not correspond to the typical distribution of cultures in the early Iron Age.

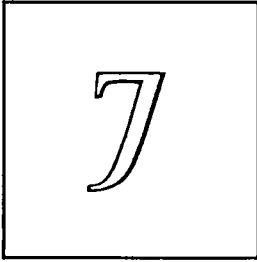
It is still possible, therefore, to share Professor Ehret's view that these languages originated to the west of Lake Tanganyika and subsequently spread northwards and southwards. It is equally defensible to place their origins in the far north or in any of a number of areas along the upper Kasai or the upper Zambezi.

Within that area, traces of non-Bantu languages are discernible in the southernmost Bantu languages which have borrowed some of their vocabulary and phonology from the Khoi and San languages. In East Africa, the geographical distribution of languages shows that their progress there was highly eventful. Bantu and other languages are closely intertwined, and even in the recent past non-Bantu languages have encroached on Bantu languages and vice versa. The Bantu expansion did not proceed without reverses. On the contrary, it is more than likely that reverses occurred and that the setbacks lasted for centuries, affecting large portions of the Bantu-speaking region. If this is so, however, it should be possible to find traces of these other languages, as in the case of the central Sudanese influence in eastern Zaïre.

Our study comes to an end around the year +1100, when the Bantu had settled in most of subequatorial Africa (an area which they still occupy) and, most importantly, when their cultures had begun to assume well-defined regional characteristics.

At the present stage of research, it is not possible to make a definite statement about the origins of the Bantu or why they expanded throughout the length and breadth of subequatorial Africa.

Whether they originated in West Africa, in the Baḥr-al-Ghazāl region of the Republic of Sudan, around the Congo-Zambezi river watershed or in the region of the Great Lakes of East Africa, one factor seems to be well established. Whatever the origins of the speakers of Bantu languages, they moved from their original homelands and eventually displaced and incorporated Khoisan and probably Sudanic stocks in vast regions of subequatorial Africa, an exercise they had largely accomplished by the end of the early Iron Age and the beginning of the second millennium of the Christian era.



Egypt from the Arab conquest until the end of the Fāṭimid state (1171)

The conquest

The Arabs had already conquered vast territories in Syria and Mesopotamia when they entered Egypt, attracted as they were by the legendary opulence of its countryside and its large industrious population. Through this territory, Islam, organized and triumphant, came into contact with Africa. Right up to the present, Egypt has retained this vital role of mediator between the Arab East and black Africa.

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, one of the Pleiad of brilliant Arab generals of the early conquest, entered Egypt in December 639 at the head of a modest army. After easily occupying al-Arīṣh and al-Farāma, he advanced to Bilbays and Heliopolis without meeting any serious opposition from the Byzantine army. The Byzantines entrenched themselves in the fortified town of Babylon, situated at the point where the Nile branches out into the Delta. After some months of siege, Babylon fell in April 641; at the same time Arab troops carried out expeditions in Fayyūm and in the Delta, occupying the countryside.

Two months after the fall of Babylon, 'Amr began the siege of Alexandria, the capital of Byzantine Egypt, a gigantic fortified town with a population of six hundred thousand, one of the metropolises of the Mediterranean. In September 642, it capitulated to the Arab army and with its fall the Byzantine rule of Egypt came to an end. The party dissensions that divided the Greeks and the hatred of the Copts against their rulers, on religious and other grounds, facilitated the task of the invaders. The Arab conquest came at a time when the Egyptian population keenly resented the Byzantine authority of Constantinople and its local representation in Alexandria. The Coptic population could not identify itself with the Byzantine state on either political or religious grounds or with its language.

Breaking with the tradition of establishing the centre of political authority in the port of Alexandria, 'Amr chose Babylon, just between the Delta and Middle Egypt, as the capital of the province. A mosque, the centre of religious and political assembly, set the seal on the unity of the new city, which was referred to as Fuṣṭāṭ, of Fuṣṭāṭ-Miṣr.

Until the Fāṭimid period, Alexandria remained a town of secondary importance which was kept under close supervision by the provincial authority, since there was

a risk of a Byzantine landing in its port, which would have made possible the establishment of a bridgehead. Indeed, in 645 the Byzantine navy briefly reoccupied the town and its reconquest by the Muslims was no easy matter.

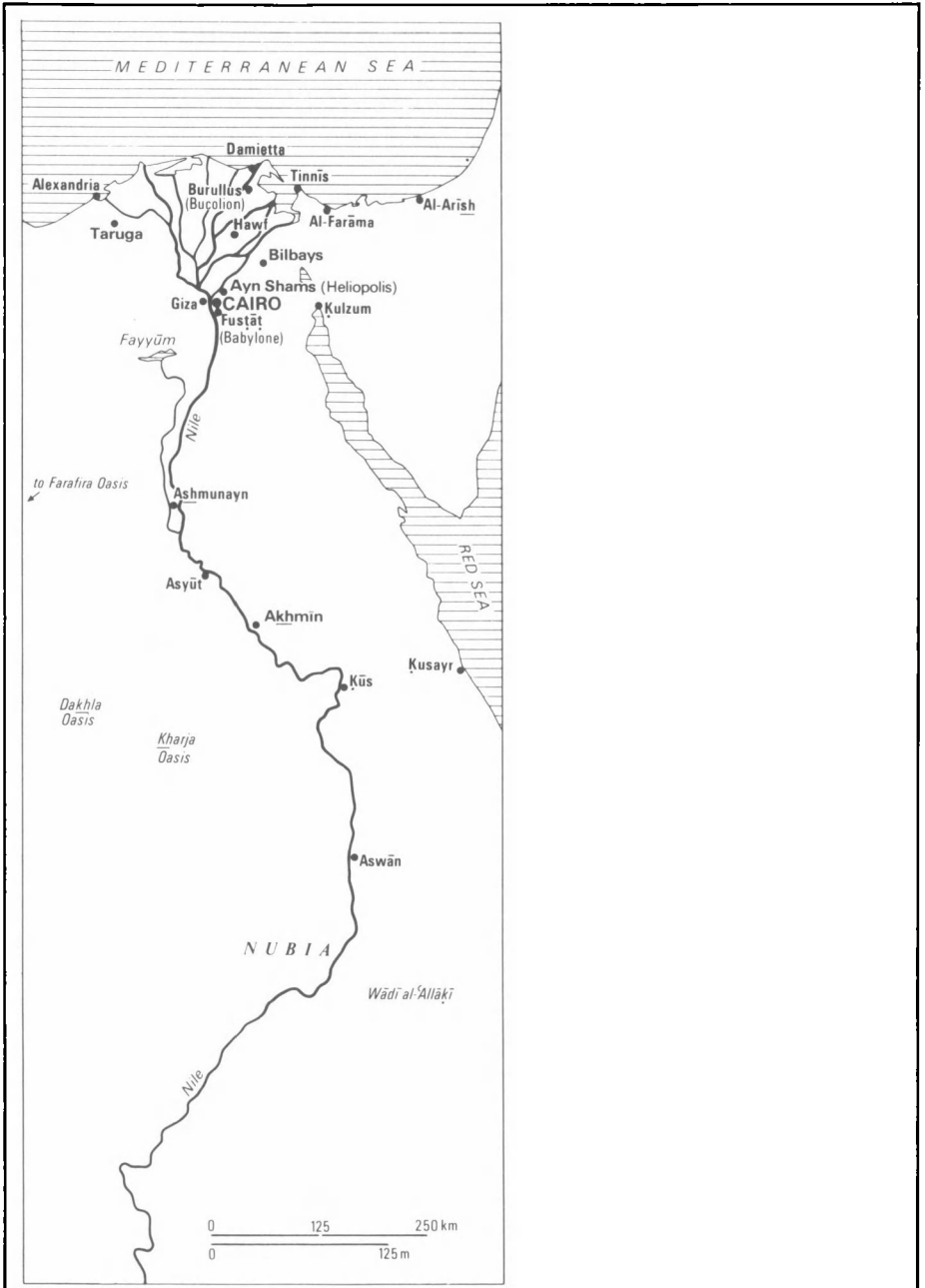
The fiscal regime imposed on Egypt by the Arabs at the time of the conquest was rather ambiguous, since it was not clear whether Egypt was a country occupied by a bloodless capitulation or a land wrested from its inhabitants by armed force. In the former case, the land remained in the hands of those who cultivated it, who were obliged to pay a tax in kind, sometimes called *kharādī*, in addition to the poll-tax, sometimes called *ḍjizya*. In the case of an armed conquest, the land went to the Muslim community, which was free to employ conquered peasants whose lives had been spared as workmen or as tenant farmers.

The ambiguities of this situation were variously exploited. The existence of the treaty of capitulation stood in the way of the land claims of the Arab chiefs, whereas Copts who were reluctant to meet the demands made on them were reminded that the land conquered by armed force could be taken away from them. The poll-tax paid by Christians and Jews ranged from one to four dinars yearly for every male over the age of fourteen. Tax in kind, based on the area of the land worked, consisted of provisions of grain, oil, vinegar and sometimes clothing or animals. By means of the Nile/Red Sea canal the victuals could be sent to Arabia; similarly, a large part of the gold collected was sent to the Caliph. Initially, the authorities fixed a total figure for the tax revenue demanded of each administrative division, leaving it to the tax-collectors and the Church to distribute the burden among individuals and among farms. Caliph 'Uṭhmān, conscious of the danger represented by a provincial governor, with an army at his disposal, as well as the gold that financed the Caliphate and the wheat for consumption by its capital, suggested that 'Amr place fiscal administration in the hands of the governor of Upper Egypt, 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd, while retaining political and military responsibility. When 'Amr refused to 'hold the horns of the cow while someone else milked it', he was recalled and 'Abd Allāh was appointed as sole governor of Egypt in 644.

In 652 'Abd Allāh launched an expedition against Nubia and reached as far as Dongola. The Christian population, close to the Monophysite Church of Egypt, put up fierce resistance and the invaders preferred to negotiate. The *baḳt* signed with the Nubians provided that the latter would deliver slaves and would receive victuals and fabrics. Regarded by Muslim jurists as a trade treaty – and not as a political instrument – negotiated on equal terms, this *baḳt* was still in force at the end of the Fāṭimid period. Incidents sometimes broke out – raids by Nubian pillagers in Upper Egypt, struggles for the gold or emerald mines – but the country upstream of Aswān remained independent.

The installation of the Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus in 661 represented a northward shift in the centre of the Islamic world. The maritime world between Arabs and Byzantines, which began with the victory of the Masts (Dhat al-Sawari) won by the Egyptian seamen in 655, dealt a heavy blow to trade in the Mediterranean. From then onwards, the Red Sea was abandoned in favour of the Gulf and land routes which, in Egypt, ran east–west and no longer north–south.

Although the revolt which led to the assassination of the Caliph 'Uṭhmān, leader



7.1 Arab Egypt. (G. Duby, 1978)

of the Umayyad party, started among the Arab troops in Egypt, this province contributed significantly through the action of its governor, 'Amr ibn al-'Aṣ, to the final defeat of the claims of the Caliph 'Alī both at Siffin and Adḥruh, and to the victory of the Umayyad dynasty. The party of 'Alī – the Shī'ā – therefore never had many followers in Egypt, despite the posthumous affection always shown for the descendants of the Prophet.

When the Arabs first came to Egypt, they took over the Byzantine state apparatus. The Greek language, the subaltern tax officials, the administrative divisions and the coinage were all kept. The Monophysite Church retained its role of intermediary between the state and the individual. Gradually the Christian symbols with which the Byzantine state stamped its coins and the papyri were replaced by texts from the *Qoran*. From 706 onwards, Arabic had to be used for the drawing up of official instruments throughout the Caliphate. Bilingual Arabic/Greek papyri appeared in Egypt soon after the conquest and this practice was not abandoned until about 720. In the first quarter of the eighth century, Egypt went over completely to Arabic. Coptic survived in the countryside for two centuries and longer in the Monophysite Copt liturgy, but already by the end of the tenth century even Christian historians were writing their chronicles in Arabic. Unlike the Persians and the Turks, who adopted Islam but retained, or returned to, their national language and thus enjoyed cultural autonomy, the Egyptians became merged in the Arab-speaking world stretching from the Atlantic to Mesopotamia. Born as it was in the Middle Ages, with its boundaries not reproducing those of any previously existing empire or any natural unity, the Arab-speaking world has survived up till the present, integrating Egyptian civilization into a wider framework than the Nile valley.

Under the Umayyad Caliphate, few Arabs lived in the Egyptian countryside and the presence of the Muslim soldiers among the Egyptians in the towns raised no problem. Mutual acculturation soon took place and both Copts and Arabs gained access to the urban way of life previously reserved for the Hellenized classes. There was an increase in the number of persons not participating in agricultural production, such as soldiers, administrators, artisans and clerics. The urban way of life entailed increased expenditure and, when conquests slowed down, the treasury could no longer rely on the spoils of war. Fiscal pressure became heavier and levies were made, to the detriment of the countryside.

Resistance to the new fiscal demands was at first passive: the peasants deserted the villages where they were registered, disappearing or becoming monks in order to evade the poll-tax. When 'Abd al-'Azīz (b. Marwān 685–704) extended the poll-tax to cover monks, the Copts found a solution by converting to Islam. The Muslim authorities had to choose between encouraging conversions, which entailed a decrease in fiscal revenue, or amending the law, so as not to allow exemption for new Muslims. Qurra b. *Sharik*, who was governor from 709 to 714, refused to abolish the poll-tax for converted Copts and proceeded against fugitives; he increased production by placing fallow land under cultivation and planting sugarcane. Caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (717–20) introduced a legal device to solve the problem of conversions – which, as a fervent Muslim, he wanted to increase – by separating the persons of the new Muslims, who were exempted from poll-tax, from

their land, which kept its previous status as *ḵharādī* land.

In 750 the Umayyads were overthrown and their last Caliph was killed in Egypt in August of the same year. The seat of the new Abbasid Caliphate was transferred to Baghdad in Mesopotamia, beyond the historical bounds of the Hellenistic and Roman world, far indeed from Egypt. The regional function of *Fuṣṭāṭ*, which served as a relay for the authority of the distant capital separated from Egypt by vast steppes, was accordingly enhanced and broadened.

From 767 to 868, revolts continued almost without interruption in Egypt. The uprisings of the Copts were triggered by the replacement of the local Christian officials by Muslims, particularly in the small towns in the Delta. In 832 Christians had taken up arms alone against the Muslim authority in Egypt for the last time; in all the subsequent revolts, they combined with Muslims in movements led by the latter.

From the ninth century onwards, the Arabs of the tribes and the soldiers were at the root of the main disturbances. The spoils of war steadily diminished but the soldiers had to be paid in peacetime and additional expenses had to be defrayed when they were in action. Their loyalty depended on their being paid regularly. In the event of a revolt, local armies were too closely assimilated and were therefore unreliable, and troops had to be brought in at great expense from Mesopotamia.

Some of the Arabs of the tribes, having settled on the edges of the Delta, had retained a semi-nomadic pastoral way of life. Other Arabs, on the contrary, had become peasants, adopting the way of life and the customs of the Copts, from whom they were difficult to distinguish, since the latter were also assimilating to the Arabs and Islam. All alike were up in arms against the tax-collector.

The participation of Arabs from the tribes in the revolts is reported from 785 onwards. From 814 to 832 there was total anarchy in Egypt, with the authority of *Fuṣṭāṭ* no longer being recognized except in Middle and Upper Egypt. Without going into details, it should be mentioned that the dispatch of four thousand Turkish soldiers and the presence in Egypt of the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mūn were required to restore order in 832. From the following year onwards, the Arabs were excluded from the *dīwāns*, so that, once they were freed from military obligations, they were no longer entitled to the state pension.

As for the descendants of the Arabs of the conquest, three destinies lay open to them. The members of the aristocratic or merchant families of Arabia and those of the *ḵabilas* settled around the towns had become urbanized. As officials, jurists or merchants, they benefited from the economic development of the cities. Other groups, as we have seen, were assimilated with the indigenous rural populations and shared the burden of taxation. Thirdly, many Arabs remained Bedouins, whether they were semi-nomads settled on the fringe of the cultivated lands, as in Egypt, or authentic nomads wandering over the steppes. Thrown out of the armies, they became marginalized once again and displayed a sense of resentment and contempt for the urban life from which they were debarred. They therefore became receptive to the agitation of various anti-government groups. The pillaging of caravans, holy places or weakly defended towns enabled them to regain possession of property amassed as the result of wars waged by their ancestors in former times. Thus, the Arab conquest led to a situation in which, two centuries later, the descendants

of the victors were to be found both among those privileged by the regime and among the exploited and rejected.

Egypt autonomous

Under the reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tasim (833–42), Turkish slaves were introduced in such great numbers that they gained control of the army and soon exerted influence even on the civil, fiscal and provincial administration. The Caliphs were reduced to figureheads and the administration of the provinces was entrusted to Turkish chiefs, who continued to reside in Baghdad or Samarra, delegating their actual government to a relative. Aḥmad b. Ṭülün, who arrived in Egypt in 868, appanaged by Bākbāk, had initially been given only political and military authority over the province, while financial and fiscal control was retained by an Arab administrator. After four years, Ibn Ṭülün was able to oust him and to become the absolute ruler.

Ibn Ṭülün, who was thirty-three years of age, was, like all his Turkish comrades, possessed of excellent military credentials, but he stood out from them by reason of his religious and literary culture. He placed his intelligence in the service of his ambition and seldom resorted to brute force.

He had first to intervene in Upper Egypt, where three revolts broke out in 869 and 870. This region was of vital importance as a link to Nubia, with its gold-mines at Wādī al-'Allāḳī and its regular supply of slaves, provided for by the *bakt* treaty. After a series of campaigns, Ibn Ṭülün restored order. New trade links were established with the Red Sea and Arabia and with the Maghrib along the caravan routes starting out from the western oases.

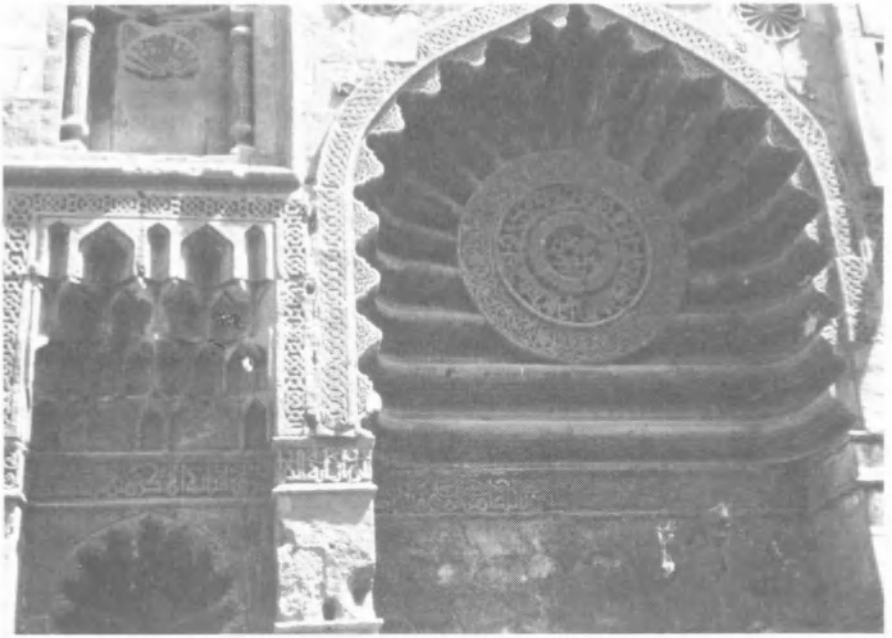
Ibn Ṭülün had at his disposal the wheat of Egypt and the gold and slaves of Nubia: the Caliphate needed the tribute he sent to Iraq in order to pay its troops, whereas he had nothing to expect from that institution in return. Two courses were open to the powerful and ambitious governor of Egypt: either to make himself independent of the Caliph like the prince of North Africa and keep the tribute for himself, or, on the contrary, to intervene in Iraq's domestic affairs. In 870 a new Caliph, al-Mu'tamid, had been installed and had entrusted his brother al-Muwaffaq with the eastern part of the empire. Ibn Ṭülün secured from the Caliph the responsibility for levying the *ḵharādj* in Syria and in Cilicia. In exchange, he sent the tribute from Egypt direct to the Caliph for his personal needs. Out of a fiscal revenue of 4,300,000 dinars, Ibn Ṭülün apparently sent 2,200,200 a year to the Caliph, and in 876 an additional 1,200,000 to al-Muwaffaq. The latter, who was faced with two dangerous revolts – the Saffārids in Persia and the Zandj black slaves in the south of Iraq – considered the amounts he received from Egypt insufficient and sent an army to drive Ibn Ṭülün out of Egypt, but the soldiers, not having been paid, disbanded at Raḳqa.

In retaliation, Ibn Ṭülün invaded Syria in 878 without encountering any resistance except at Antioch. Now that he was in undisputed command of Egypt and Syria, he secretly invited the Caliph to come and reside in Fuṣṭāṭ. However, the Caliph, after an attempt at flight, was brought back to his capital and was compelled by al-Muwaffaq to sign an instrument removing Ibn Ṭülün from office. The latter convened a meeting in Damascus of *ḵādīs*, jurisconsults and *shārifs* from Egypt, Syria and Cilicia and



7.2 *The mosque of Ibn Ṭulūn in Cairo: partial view of the courtyard, the minaret and the pavilion of ablution. (Unesco/A. Khalil)*

7.3 *Fāṭimid mosque: eleventh-century decoration of the façade. (J. Devisse)*



obtained from them a vote legalizing a *djihād* against al-Muwaffaq. However, before matters came to an open confrontation, Ibn Ṭulūn died in Fuṣṭāṭ in March 884.

He was succeeded by his son *Khumārawayh*, who managed to add Tarsus and *Djazīra* to his principality, and to persuade the Caliph to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Tulunid dynasty over Egypt and Syria for a period of thirty years. After twelve years of reign, in 896, *Khumārawayh* was assassinated in Damascus, leaving the treasury empty. The reign of his son *Djaysh*, and subsequently of his son *Hārūn*, completely ruined the dynasty, which was incapable of defending Syria against the *Ḳarmatians*. This sect of *Ismā'īlite* Alid origin, which arose in Mesopotamia in the eighth century, had exploited the bitterness of the Arabs who had been excluded from the Caliphate's armies, which were now Turkish or black. From 902 onwards, the Bedouins invaded Syria and easily overcame the Tulunid army of Damascus. This defeat alarmed the Abbasids; their general, *Muḥammad b. Sulaymān*, entered Syria and crushed the *Ḳarmatians* in 903. He then continued his march on Fuṣṭāṭ, which he entered in January 905, just after *Hārūn b. Khumārawayh* had been killed.

After the death of Ibn Ṭulūn, political authority was fragile: it was threatened by the prince's peers, his relations or his generals, who knew the military basis of his legitimacy. Once a prince was replaced by force, this group prevailed on the mosque authorities to recognize the *fait accompli*, which they readily did. They held that any act strengthening a *de facto* political authority capable of functioning was morally and legally commendable. This ready consensus goes to show that the religious authorities were not interested in the legal bases of a provincial authority so long as the *khutba* was pronounced on behalf of the Caliph. The split between civil society and the military began to emerge. Fuṣṭāṭ and Damascus, the provincial towns of artisans and merchants, who were prone to haggling and were narrow-minded, distrusted the Tulunid princes, whose morals and culture were marked by Persian indulgence. This nascent middle class identified itself with the religious class, *ahl al-māsdjīd*, and kept a close watch on the lower classes, *aṣfal al-nās*, the sons of peasants or of soldiers, who were ill-suited to city life.

From the fall of the Tulunids in 905 to the installation of *Muḥammad b. Ṭughdj* as governor in 935, Egypt underwent a series of disorders which it would be idle to recount. Governors, whose functions were confined to military and political affairs, succeeded one another and the army, irregularly paid, took to pillaging. To escape this, the inhabitants of Fuṣṭāṭ asked for the troops to be transferred to Giza – a logical request since that town was threatened by the Berbers. Settled on the left bank of the Nile and in the Delta and the Fayyūm, they acted on behalf of the Fāṭimid dynasty established in Ifrīḳiya. Berber contingents had been merged with the Egyptian army, together with the other troops recruited during the Tulunid period. This mosaic of ethnic groups gave rise to disciplinary problems; the clashes between 'westerners' and 'easterners' were a prelude to the great encounters of the Fāṭimid period.

Two institutions characteristic of the Muslim Middle Ages, the *iktā'* and the *wakf*, developed in Egypt at the end of the Tulunid period and during the ensuing disorders. Until then the payment in cash and allowances in kind due to the soldiers were the responsibility of the provinces in which the army engaged. Now, in order to decentralize the financial operation, the officer in command was given a mandate to collect

taxes directly from a rural district and was wholly or partly responsible for maintaining the men under his command. The *ikṭā'* bound the officer in command to the territory he was entrusted to defend, while relieving the provincial administration of the burden.

Civil *ikṭā's* were no doubt constituted for the benefit of financial administrators, such as the Mādharāī, to guarantee their advances to the treasury. Their office undoubtedly enabled them to build up immense fortunes in landed property and real estate which was envied by those in power. The administrators resorted to setting their property up in *wakfs* to ensure that only their descendants would enjoy the benefit of it.

As a result of these two institutions, the towns bore down more heavily on the countryside, increasing the taxation on the agricultural yield, and leaving the peasants at best with only the bare minimum for the subsistence of their families. At the same time the peasants no longer resorted to violence – at least not in the form of large-scale revolts. This was due to the closer supervision of the countryside as a result of the *ikṭā'* system and the absolute military superiority of the professional soldier over the armed civilian.

In July 935, Muḥammad b. Ṭughdj was appointed governor of Egypt. Grandson of a Turkish soldier in the Caliphal guard and son of a former governor of Damascus, Ibn Ṭughdj had exercised numerous commands. His primary mission being to protect the western flank of the Caliphate against an imminent attack by the Fāṭimids, he was granted the right to constitute an autonomous principality. In 939, he assumed the title of al-*Ikḫshīd*, the Servant, a title traditionally borne by the princes of the Ferghāna. In 935 he defeated the Berbers who had occupied the Island of Roda opposite the Fuṣṭāṭ and chased them away. A year later they came back with a Fāṭimid army to attack Egypt, but again met with a defeat. The wealth of Ifrīqiya, the gold it received through the Sahara and its relations with Andalusia and Sicily had all attracted considerable traffic coming from the Red Sea and hence the caravan trails running parallel to the Mediterranean coast and linking North Africa with the Delta, the oases and Upper Egypt had increased in number. However, it was difficult to exercise military control over these trade routes.

In accordance with Tulunid tradition, Ibn Ṭughdj regarded Syria as an integral part of his principality. He had to dispute that province with a number of military chiefs driven out of Mesopotamia, who looked upon it as a compensation. With one of them, Ibn Rā'īk, he concluded a matrimonial alliance, and they then divided Syria between them, the south going to the *Ikḫshīd*, the north with Damascus to Ibn Rā'īk. The last years of Ibn Ṭughdj's life were occupied by the struggle with the emerging and strong Hamdānid dynasty from Mosul, which, after killing Ibn Rā'īk, occupied Aleppo and laid claim to the whole of northern Syria. After Al-*Ikḫshīd*'s death (in 945), his son Unudjūr continued the struggle, which ended in 947 with a peace treaty which granted the *Ikḫshīdids* control over Ramla-Palestine, Tiberias-Jordan and Damascus. Except for brief periods, the boundaries thus drawn were to remain in force for a century and a half.

Ibn Ṭughdj had placed at the head of his army a black eunuch, Kāfūr, a remarkable personality, who combined indisputable military, administrative and diplomatic abilities with a deep Sunnite faith. After the death of Ibn Ṭughdj, Kāfūr directed the *Ikḫshīdid* state under the principate of Ibn Ṭughdj's two sons, Unudjūr (946–61) and

‘Alī (961–6). From 966 until his death in 968, Kāfūr exercised power in Egypt and southern Syria in his own right, with the title of *al-Ustādh*, and his authority was recognized by the Abbasid Caliph.

The Kāfūrīd period was marked by growing insecurity in Egypt and Syria. In addition to the Fāṭimid threat from the west, there was the new aggressiveness of the Nubians in the south, who attacked the oases in 950 and Aswān in 956. The Bedouins of Arabia and Syria fell upon caravans of pilgrims. These incidents can be connected with the frequency of food shortages in Egypt at the time, owing to inadequate floods. Both the Bedouins and the Nubians bought cereals and, when price increases in Egypt made the terms of trade too unfavourable for them, they resorted to armed force in order to obtain cheap supplies of food.

Kāfūr therefore strengthened the army, introducing black slaves bought in the markets of Upper Egypt. These *Kāfūrīyya* were never completely integrated into the *Ikḥshīdiyya* – which were formed of white *ghūlāms*, Turks or Daylamites – and the two formed separate hostile groups. After his death, the senior officers were unable to agree on a successor from among themselves and the original system introduced by Kāfūr did not survive him. If there had been a man of his character among the military chiefs, a regime prefiguring that of the Mamluks might have come into being three centuries earlier on the banks of the Nile.

Imperial Egypt

At the beginning of the summer of 969, the Fāṭimid general of Dalmatian origin, Djawhar, gained a victory on both banks of the Nile downstream of Fuṣṭāṭ, giving him access to that town and forcing the *Ikḥshīdīd* and Kāfūrīd chiefs to flee to Syria. The Fāṭimid victory had been prepared by propagandists with considerable funds at their disposal, who exerted their psychological influence on a public opinion which had been disconcerted by the political vacuum that had followed the death of Kāfūr and had been crippled by the effects of a very serious famine. Recourse to arms had brought the long process of destabilization of the state in Egypt to a successful outcome.

Djawhar had conquered Egypt for his master, the Fāṭimid *Imām* al-Mu‘izz, who had remained in Ifrīkiya. Before inviting the latter to join him, Djawhar had two further tasks to perform: creating a capital worthy of receiving a Caliph and ensuring the security of the country. He founded Cairo, to the north of Fuṣṭāṭ, built a palace there for the *Imām*, a cathedral mosque known today by the name al-Azhar, and barracks for the different army corps. He lost no time in doing this, for by 971 the first buildings were completed, and Djawhar sent a message to his master announcing that he was awaited in his new capital.

The Fāṭimids claimed to be descendants of al-Ḥusayn, the son of Fāṭima, daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad, and of ‘Alī, the Prophet’s spiritual successor. Contrary to the Imamite *Shī‘ism*, which recognized twelve descendants of ‘Alī, the Fāṭimids belonged to the *Ismā‘īlite* branch of the *Shī‘ā* which recognizes only seven and which embodied the most radical religious and social claims of the Alid movement. *Qarmatism*, which also stemmed from *Ismā‘īlism*, had taken up arms against the Abbasid theocracy at the end of the ninth century and at the same time had rejected

Islamic religious rites and Muslim social and family ethics; it was a response to the secret aspirations of those who had not become assimilated to the new urban centres.

The origin of the Fāṭimid movement was identical, but it had separated from the Ḳarmatians at the beginning of the tenth century, when the latter extended their influence to Syria. 'Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī, the Fāṭimid *Imām*, had left Syria for Ifrīkiya, where he established a Caliphate. Relying on the devoted courage of a few Berber groups, mainly the Kutāma, and of élite troops of Slavs, his successors gained possession of the greater part of North Africa and Sicily. They made preparations for the conquest of Egypt, the last stage before that of Baghdad. The Islam they preached could scarcely shock Egypt: a few minor differences in ritual and equal rights to inheritance for women, but a rather harsh moral attitude towards them, were not enough to deter the Sunnites of Fuṣṭāṭ, who were attracted to it by their devotion to the family of the Prophet. *Djawhar* did not have to face any religious opposition and he kept the same *kādi*, who continued to judge in the mosque of 'Amr. It is true that, alongside the public doctrine, which was close to that of Imamism, an elaborate secret doctrine was reserved for initiates.

The Ḳarmatians, who had openly condemned the rites, in particular the pilgrimage, now emerged as the fiercest enemies of the Fāṭimids, their former allies. The pretext for war was the invasion of Syria by a Berber army sent by *Djawhar*, which conquered the former *Ikhshīdīd* domain of Ramla, Tiberias and Damascus. An army was then dispatched against Antioch, which the Byzantines had just occupied, but it had to be recalled owing to the attack of Damascus by the Ḳarmatians, which was instigated by the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad, who wanted to regain control of Syria. In 971 Syria was evacuated by the Fāṭimids and *Djawhar* repelled with difficulty the Ḳarmatians besieging Cairo.

In June 973 the *Imām* al-Mu'izz took possession of his new capital and his palace. A new attack on Cairo by the Ḳarmatians was repelled, and the attackers were driven off to Syria, which they also had to abandon. Security was re-established in the east; in the north, commercial shipping in the Mediterranean was able to develop as a result of an agreement with Byzantium; in the south, the *baḳī* with the Christian sovereign of Nubia was renewed. In fact the real vocation of the Fāṭimid empire was trade. The influence of al-Mu'izz's adviser, Ya'kūb ibn Killis, an Iraqi Jew, was decisive in this respect. As vizier during the greater part of the reign of al-'Azīz, he conducted an intelligent foreign policy. Preferring to support protectorates in Syria rather than engage in costly military operations, he concerned himself mainly with the smooth functioning of economic relations. He encouraged the long-distance trade of very high-priced merchandise linking southern Europe and North Africa to the Indian Ocean and the Horn of Africa. Once the Ḳarmatians were defeated and famine was a thing of the past in Egypt, pilgrimages could be resumed in 974 and the *khutba* in the name of the Fāṭimid sovereign was pronounced in Mecca and Medina, then provisioned in wheat from the Nile. Pilgrims from all over the Islamic world took part in the glorification of the Cairo dynasty.

Under the reign of al-'Azīz (975-96), Egypt experienced calm and prosperity. Its influence spread over the southern Mediterranean, North Africa, the Arabian peninsula and central and southern Syria. In the latter provinces a very cautious policy was

followed up till the death, in 991, of Ibn Killis. From 992 al-'Azīz launched out into more daring actions. Relying on an army that had been thoroughly reformed by the introduction of Turkish armoured horsemen and the improvement of siege engineering, he attacked the Hamdānid ruler of Aleppo and his powerful Byzantine protector. At the same time he installed a Fāṭimid governor in Damascus and drove the Bedouins out of Palestine.

Al-'Azīz left to his son al-Hākīm (996–1021) a situation that was less brilliant than might have appeared. The population of Fuṣṭāṭ and Cairo, the twin capitals of the richest empire of the period, had increased tremendously, since Berber, Slav, Turkish and black soldiers and Iraqi and Syrian merchants and artisans had flocked to these towns, where gold was said to flow freely. The entry of tribute from the provinces and the taxes levied on traffic crossing Egypt gave rise to the accumulation of stocks of the precious metal. The main sources of tax revenue, in metal and in kind, were the Egyptian countryside and the artisans of the provincial towns, although tax-farmers and fiscal officials took a large part for themselves. These were often Jews or Christians, and they had aroused intolerance towards all minority groups among the Sunnites of Fuṣṭāṭ.

The rapid promotion of the Turks in the army and the financial profit they derived thereby provoked the envy of the Berber troops, which seized power on the death of Al-'Azīz, taking advantage of the youth of al-Hākīm. The persecuted eastern soldiers allied with the Slav eunuchs (*as-Ṣaḳāliba*) and the Christian and Iraqi officials to eliminate the Berbers.

Al-Hākīm was the last Arab sovereign in history to have exercised absolute power over a vast empire. He appointed neither a vizier nor an army chief, designating instead a general for the duration of operations. In his youth al-Hākīm had observed the parasitic behaviour of the courtiers of al-'Azīz and all his life he viewed the palace entourage with hatred and contempt. He liked to visit Fuṣṭāṭ, its markets and humble quarters, and was in direct contact with Sunnite artisans and merchants. He became aware of the burden imposed on the country by the luxury and the barrier raised by the dignitaries between the sovereign and his subjects. He tried to remove this intermediary category by executing all those whom he suspected of dishonesty or personal ambition. Suffering from the strains imposed by absolute power, he tried to find a solution, but this proved too much for him and his reason was clouded by fits of buffoonery and desperate bloody acts of madness.

His religious policy was inconsistent. He tried to win acceptance for the Fāṭimid ritual in Fuṣṭāṭ, and then, in order to attract the Sunnites, he pressed Christians and Jews into converting to Islam and erected mosques over their places of worship. In 1009 he even had the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem pulled down. At about the same time, from 1006 to 1013, he adopted a tolerant attitude to the Sunnite ritual and appointed Sunnite teachers to the *Dār al-'ilm* which he had founded. He then reverted to the prohibitions of the Sunnite rite and in 1017 he allowed some Persians to preach his divinity. This was a failure: the propagandists were massacred and in the following year al-Hākīm saw the northern quarters of Fuṣṭāṭ sacked by the black soldiers. Sensing that his attempt to found a direct monarchy on a consensus of the Sunnite urban middle classes had failed, he lost interest in Fuṣṭāṭ and authorized Jews and Christians who so wished to abjure the Islam he had imposed on them ten years earlier. His murder,

disguised as a disappearance, was instigated by his close entourage, which feared further purges. Some of the adepts of his divinity founded the Druse sect in Syria.

The Arab tribes had triggered off many disturbances during al-Hākīm's reign. Abū Raḳwa, an Umayyad, stirred up the Zanāta Berbers and the Banū Ḳurra Arabs to revolt in Tripolitania. Having conquered several Fāṭimid armies, he threatened Fuṣṭāṭ in 1066. The civilian population then showed its loyalty to al-Hākīm, although acts of treason were reported at the court and among Berber troops. Abū Raḳwa was captured, thanks to the support of the Nubians, and was executed near Cairo. The Fāṭimid army had shown signs of ineffectiveness and it had cost the treasury one million dinars to put the rebellion down.

The great crisis of the eleventh century

Under the reign of al-Zāhir (1021–36) and of his son, al-Mustanṣir (1036–94), the policy followed was no longer determined by the will of the *Imām*, but by the complex interaction of pressure groups. Right up to 1062 the situation in the empire steadily deteriorated under the effects of the weaknesses already mentioned. In peacetime, the army, made up of a variety of often hostile ethnic groups, consumed the greater part of the public revenue. At time of war, the troops also had to be equipped with mounts and weapons and be given additional pay. The funds at the disposal of the treasury did not increase, unlike the number of persons entitled to pensions, such as the extended family of the *Imām*, *sharīfs*, civil servants and troops, and conflicts of interest constantly arose. Poorly paid, the soldiers pillaged the countryside and the suburbs. The army was no longer a factor in maintaining order but was the basic cause of insecurity.

The towns were overcrowded; the cemeteries of the Ḳarafa were peopled by populations driven from the countryside by Bedouin incursions, while the élite left the outlying districts to seek security in the centre of Fuṣṭāṭ or Cairo. The merchants awaited the great Muslim feasts with anxiety, for the crowds took to pillaging the closed markets. Food shortages became more acute and more frequent. Whenever a poor flood was anticipated, speculation pushed up the price of wheat. Al-Djardjarā'ī, who was vizier from 1027 to 1045, managed to put a stop to the price rises by imposing a single market for grain and encouraging price-cutting competition among the bakers, but all the high officials, including the *Imām*, built up stocks and engaged in speculation.

A general destabilization of the populations on the fringes of the desert also became apparent: the great Arab tribes of Syria wished to obtain access to the cultivated lands for their herds and to pillage the towns on the side. A climatic change – with drier winters – may account for this development. Up to 1041 the Fāṭimid general al-Dizbiri held the tribes in check in Syria. In Upper Egypt advantage was taken of the treason of the Zirīd Ibn Bādīs to send to Tripolitania and to Ifriḳiya the Banū Hilāl and the Banū Sulaym that were ravaging the country (1050).

In 1059 the Fāṭimids won their last great diplomatic victory: their Turkish general, al-Basāsiri, sent the Abbasid Caliph al-Ḳā'im into captivity and had the invocation pronounced in the mosque of Baghdad in favour of al-Mustanṣir. However, a few months later, Tughril Bek, ruler of the Seldjukids, the new Sunnite masters of the east, retook Baghdad and re-established al-Ḳā'im. The situation was reversed when, in

1070, the Fāṭimid general Nāṣir al-Dawla, in rebellion in Alexandria, recognized the Abbasid Caliphate, and in 1072, confining al-Mustaṣṣir in Cairo, he called on the Seldjukids for assistance. The Fāṭimid state could have come to an end on that occasion.

A great famine, which began in 1062 and was particularly severe from 1065 onwards, had starved to death a large part of the population of Egypt. The whole edifice, undermined by the parasites whom it had sheltered, was collapsing. In 1073 the *Imām* called the Armenian Badr al-Djamālī, governor of Palestine, to his assistance. This rough warrior came to Cairo in January 1074 and executed the chief officers, dispersed the dissident armies and rebuilt around his Armenian troops a small and effective army, with which he crushed the black troops who were ravaging Upper Egypt. He returned in 1076 to defend Cairo, which was being attacked by the Turk Atsiz, an ally of the Seldjukids, and, in 1077, drove the Lawāta Berbers out of the Delta, selling 20,000 women of that tribe on the market. Although unable to retake Damascus, he nevertheless consolidated Fāṭimid rule over the ports of Palestine. In order to enable the peasants to resume cultivation of their devastated fields, Badr exonerated them from taxation for three years. He reformed the administrative districts and restructured the state and army, thus extending the life of the Fāṭimid regime by a century.

The death struggle of the Fāṭimid regime

Following the 1062–76 crisis, the Fāṭimid dream of an empire was dead. The invocation on behalf of al-Mustaṣṣir was no longer pronounced either in Ifrikiya or in Mecca, Aleppo or Damascus. But Egypt, reorganized around the Nile valley, was recovering slowly from its wounds and Alexandria was regaining its prosperity through trade with Italy, while Kūs, the prefecture of Upper Egypt, was selling black slaves from Nubia and spices from India. However, both Badr and al-Mustaṣṣir died in 1094, and a new crisis shook the Fāṭimid dynasty and its doctrine. Badr's son al-Afḍal proclaimed al-Mustaṣṣir's young son, al-Ḥasan, as Caliph, and walled alive his elder brother Niẓār. The head of the Ismā'īli mission (*da'wa*) in Seldjukid territory, Ḥasan b. al-Ṣabbāh, recognized Niẓār as *Imām*: his movement, that of the *assassins*, which, like the Druse movement, developed solely outside Egypt, put an end to the traditional Fāṭimid missionary and propaganda activities.

Al-Mustaṣṣir had reigned for almost three-quarters of a century. In the not much longer period that elapsed before the dynasty died out, six Caliphs succeeded one another. None of them exercised real power or chose his successor. Authority was in the hands of the military viziers, some of whom conquered power at the point of the sword, while others inherited it. Some of these viziers were remarkable men, such as Ṭalā'ī b. Ruzẓīk, but others were nothing more than upstart brigands. In an Egypt in which the teaching of the Fāṭimid doctrine had died out, they flaunted a variety of religious convictions. Badr's grandson al-Afḍal Kutayfāt established Twelver Imamism, while Ridwān was a Sunnite and opened a *Shāfi'ite madrasa* in Alexandria. The people appeared to be indifferent to the particular shade of Islam in power; attachment to the dynasty was motivated only by pride in an Islamic power with its centre on Egyptian soil.

Three years after Badr's death, the Crusaders entered Muslim territory, overthrew



7.4 Egyptian (Fatimid)
lustre-painted ceramics. Tenth-century
vase; eleventh-century bowl. (Photo:
copyright Freer Gallery, Washington)

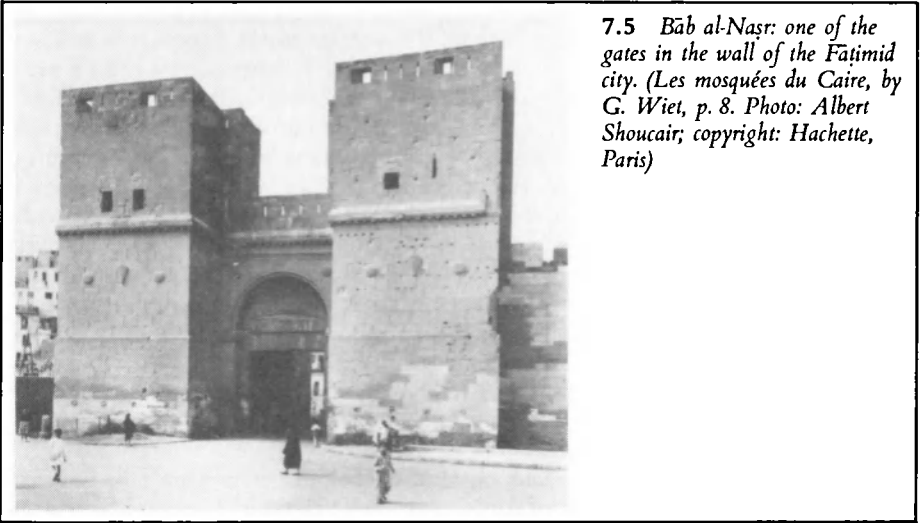


the Seldjukids and, in 1099, took Jerusalem. They defeated the Fāṭimids at Askalon. There things rested for many years, apart from a few skirmishes. There was no active complicity between Franks and Fāṭimids, who tended to be rather indifferent, as is readily understandable. Since the tenth century the Fāṭimid state's resources were derived from the levying of tribute and from the grain trade but in the twelfth century the price of grain had dropped after the calamities that had befallen the population in the eleventh century and also no doubt owing to the extension of the land under cultivation following another climatic change in Syria. Gold, which was rarer in Syria, circulated mainly between India and the West. Hence, the Fāṭimids had only to hold the Nile valley and the trading posts on the Palestine seaboard, which were frequented, like Alexandria, by Italian merchants. For the Fāṭimids, the presence of the Crusaders in Syria, raising as it did a barrier between the Seldjukids and Egypt and diverting traffic from the Red Sea to the Nile valley, had its uses. Until 1154, when Nūr al-Dīn was installed in Damascus, there had been no sign of any Muslim solidarity for the purpose of driving the Franks out of Syria.

Nūr-al-Dīn, a virtually independent vassal of the Seldjukids, relying on a powerful army, undertook the reconquest of Syria. The weak Fāṭimid state, with its army divided into rival ethnic groups, was faced with the choice between a policy of support for the counter-Crusade – a policy that exposed it to attack by the Franks – and an appeal to the latter against Nūr al-Dīn, who wanted to restore Sunnism. The parties disputing power in Cairo chose in turn one or the other of the two alternatives and sometimes both at the same time, in the hope of keeping the situation in hand. This hastened the decadence of the state.

The installation of Nūr al-Dīn in central Syria prompted the Crusaders to seek compensation in Egypt and they seized Askalon in 1153. The first concern of the Fāṭimid viziers was to protect the main southern route from the Red Sea to Alexandria via Upper Egypt and they were less interested in the north-eastern frontier. However, Ṭalā'i b. Ruz̄ik undertook two expeditions against Frankish Palestine; although victorious, he did not secure any lasting results, since Nūr al-Dīn had remained inactive. In 1161 the Franks launched their first direct offensive against Egypt and they were to launch four more, some in response to appeals from the Cairo viziers, in the period up to 1169. It was only in 1163 that they came up against troops sent by Nūr al-Dīn under the command of Shīrkūh and the latter's nephew, Ṣalāh al-Dīn (the Saladin of European chronicles). As a result of broken promises, sudden changes of alliance and betrayal on the part of the vizier Ibn Sallār and the Caliph al-'Aḏīd, this Muslim offensive came to nought. In 1169 Shīrkūh therefore took the Fāṭimid vizier's office for himself. Shortly afterwards he died and was replaced by Ṣalāh al-Dīn.

The last Fāṭimid vizier was therefore a Sunnite Kurd general, a vassal of the prince of Damascus, the Sunnite Turk Nūr al-Dīn, whose name was mentioned in the invocation following that of the *Imām*, al-'Aḏīd. This was an intolerable situation for the *Imām*, who instructed Djawhar, a black eunuch, to assassinate Ṣalāh al-Dīn. When the latter heard of this, he had Djawhar executed. The black guard of Cairo mutinied. A very bitter struggle ensued and al-'Aḏīd had to disavow the black soldiers who had laid down their lives for him. The guard was massacred. Ṣalāh al-Dīn, to whom the



7.5 *Bāb al-Naṣr*: one of the gates in the wall of the Fāṭimid city. (Les mosquées du Caire, by G. Wiet, p. 8. Photo: Albert Shoucair; copyright: Hachette, Paris)

fiction of the Fāṭimid Caliphate was useful in his struggle for power, refused to abolish it, despite Nūr al-Dīn's insistence. However, in 1171 the *khuṭba* on behalf of the Abbasid Caliph was publicly pronounced in Cairo and hence the Fāṭimid Imāmate of Egypt came to an end without there being any need to remove al-'Adīd. At that point the latter obligingly died a natural death. A regime that had lasted for two centuries finally left the political scene without any display of emotion on the part of the Egyptian population.

Conclusion

In 1171, more than five centuries after it had been conquered by the Arabs, Egypt was the richest land in the East. The ceramics, glassware, fabrics and objects of metal and of wood that came out of its workshops attained unparalleled perfection. Agriculture had kept the same features it had displayed for thousands of years, while integrating new crops that had come from Asia. Architecture, both religious and military, had produced striking monuments; and the following centuries were to be even more productive in that regard. A body of literature in Arabic was steadily developing and at the same time gradually losing its provincial character. The Iraqi and the Syrians residing in the capital played an important role but it was the quality of the historical works and of the descriptions of the features of the land of Egypt which conferred originality on this literature.

Yet acculturation had been neither quick nor complete. A large proportion of the people, whether the peasants of Upper Egypt or the artisans of the provincial towns, had remained Christian. The Sunnites of Fustāṭ, for their part, displayed indifference to the struggle for power that opposed the military chiefs, who had often risen from slavery, at the head of troops consisting of a mixture of different ethnic groups. The Egyptian personality, about which only a few texts tell us anything, was evolving slowly, by contrast with the rapid development of Fustāṭ and Cairo.



Christian Nubia at the height of its civilization

Early relations with Muslim Egypt

The emergence of a powerful Christian kingdom to the south of the First Cataract on the Nile created favourable development prospects for the Nubian population. Two factors helped them to attain economic prosperity. The first was the uniting of the northern kingdom of Nobadia (Arabic Nūba), having its capital at Faras, with the central kingdom of Makuria (Arabic Muḳurra), with its capital at Old Dongola (Arabic Dūnḳūla al-'Adjūz), and the creation of a strong central government. The second factor was the propitious settlement of relations with neighbouring Egypt by the signing of a treaty known as the *baḳt*, following the Arab invasion of Dongola led by 'Abdallāh ibn Abī Ṣarḥ in 651-2.

It appears that, at the time of the invasion, northern and central Nubia were united under King Qalidurut of Dongola. Thus 'Abdallāh ibn Abī Ṣarḥ signed only one treaty – that in Dongola – and disregarded Nobadia, with which the settlement of a correct relationship might seem to have been more important, since that country directly adjoined Egypt. The *baḳt* was a special form of treaty having no precedent in the Muslim world, and was really a truce or non-aggression pact.

The text of the *baḳt* contains provisions relating to such matters as the fact that the Arabs should not attack Nubia, that citizens of both countries should enjoy the right of free passage through that country as travellers but not as settlers, and that the authorities would be responsible for the safety of the other country's citizens. It also contained a clause providing for the extradition of fugitives from one country to another. The Nubians were to be responsible for the upkeep of the mosque built at Old Dongola to cater for visiting Muslims. Nubia was also required to pay tribute of 360 slaves, to be supplied annually to the governor of Aswān. In exchange for those slaves, the Arabs should supply 1300 *ardeb* of wheat, 1300 *kanīr* of wine and certain defined quantities of linen and cloth, etc. Thus this treaty had some of the features of a trade agreement. The truce was upheld throughout the next five centuries of Christian civilization in Nubia and in its initial phase was crucial for maintaining peace and the possibilities for national development.

The two Nubian kingdoms were united under King Merkurios, who was crowned in the year 697. After the unification of his kingdom he directed his attention principally

to the question of religious unity throughout Nubia, and at the beginning of the eighth century to the subordination of the Nubian Church to the Monophysite patriarchate in Alexandria.

Both the unification of the land and later of the religion, i.e. the creation of a common creed embracing – under the auspices of the Monophysite Church from Egypt – the united kingdom of Nubia and the southern kingdom of Alodia (about which we know very little from this period), and including Ethiopia, undoubtedly created favourable conditions for the development of Nubia. The lack of any real threat on the part of the Arabs and the possibility of carrying on trade with Egypt and maintaining contacts with Byzantium led to the development of a distinctive Nubian culture in the subsequent period. The Byzantine cultural tradition was particularly influential as a model of state administration and court organization, as well as in building construction and the arts and crafts.

Thus the end of the eighth century saw Nubia moving into its period of prosperity, which lasted up to and including over a half of the twelfth century and was also conditioned by a favourable economic situation.

The borders of the united kingdom of Nubia stretched from al-Ḳaṣr in the north (a few kilometres to the south of Aswān) down to between the Fifth and Sixth Cataracts (al-Abwāb), where it encountered the northern border of Alodia (Arabic: 'Alwa) with its capital at Soba, in the vicinity of modern-day Khartoum.

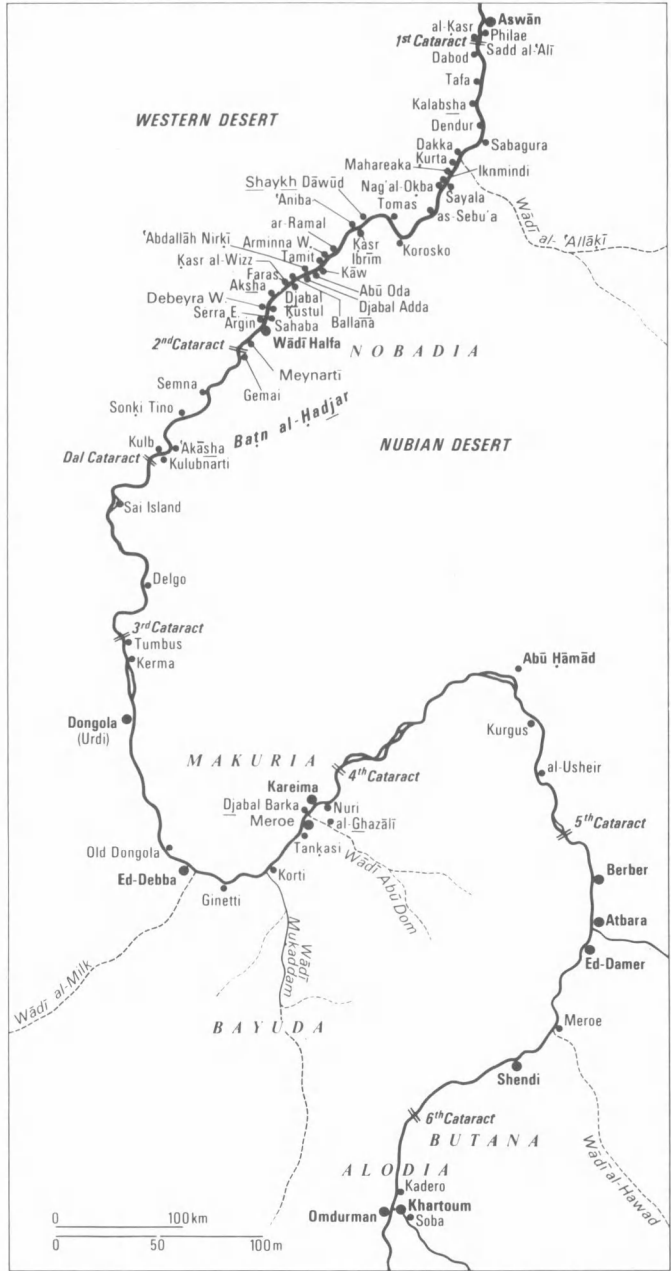
We know nothing of Alodia. An account by Ibn Sālim al-Aswānī informs us that Soba possessed magnificent buildings and gardens, as well as churches overflowing with gold. It is equally reported that the King of 'Alwa was mightier than the ruler of Makuria, had a formidable army and ruled over a land that was far more fertile. However, this has not been borne out by recent excavations carried out in Soba. The Soba area does not point to the presence of any former compact urban building complex but rather a number of scattered burnt-brick structures.

There are no direct data even about the unification of Alodia with Makuria, although in the mid-tenth century both courts were united by blood relationships. In the mid-eighth century King Kyriakos was described as being the ruler of the whole kingdom of Nubia 'right as far as the southern end of the earth'. It seems, however, that Alodia may have only temporarily been included within the united kingdom of Nubia, but was actually a separate state for almost the entire period of Christianity in Nubia.

East and west of the Nile

The eastern border of the kingdom of Nubia adjoined lands occupied by the Bēdja tribes. From the eighth to the tenth centuries, they were an important factor in shaping political relations in this part of the world.

By the beginning of the ninth century most of the Bēdja tribes living in the Red Sea hills area were still pagans. In the year 831, as a result of continual border disputes, the Caliph al-Mu'taṣim sent a punitive expedition against the Bēdja. After suffering defeat, their leader Kānūn ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz was forced to recognize the suzerainty of the Caliph. A treaty was then negotiated and, despite its containing certain clauses similar to those of the *bakt*, its meaning was altogether different, and the Bēdja were



8.1 Christian Nubia. (S. Jakobielski)

subjected to an annual tribute with no guarantee on the part of the Arabs. The latter received the right to settle on Bēdja lands, whose ruler now found himself in the position of a vassal.

The lands occupied by these nomadic tribes abounded in gold-mines (particularly in the Wādī al-'Allākī area) and Arab penetration into these lands grew in strength. Open war broke out again in the mid-ninth century, when the erstwhile leader of the Bēdja, 'Alī Bābā, had to submit in the face of overwhelming Arab forces. According to certain Arab sources, by then the tribute amounted to some 2,400 grams of gold annually.

It was only natural that, since the Bēdja were under constant threat, they sought the protection of the Nubians and it seems that Nubian forces were in some way involved in the above-mentioned battles. Ibn Ḥawqal even reported that 'Alī Bābā and the Nubian king Yurkī (Georgios) were both taken prisoner and as such were brought before the Caliph al-Mutawakkil in Baghdad. In any case, even during the period of its greatest prosperity, the kingdom of Nubia witnessed constant hostilities along the Red Sea, beyond Nubia's eastern borders.

Relations with those tribes living to the west of the Nile valley followed a different trend. Although we have little information on this matter, it seems that, in a land many days' journey from the valley over the sandy desert, there lived some pastoralist groups called the Djibāliyyūn (highlanders) and the Aḥādiyyūn, in southern (the Nūba mountains) and northern Kordofān. The latter were supposed to have practised Christianity. It has already been proved that there existed obvious linguistic links between certain tribes in the Nūba mountains (Dair, Dilling) and Dārfūr (Birgid, Midob, Tundjur) and those speaking the Nubian dialects in the Nile valley. Contacts between the Nubian kingdom and that part of the Sudan have been partially confirmed archaeologically, for example in the discovery of Christian pottery of the Nubian classic period at 'Ayn Farāḥ (in northern Dārfūr) and of a slightly later type at Koro Toro in Chad. It cannot be ruled out that Kordofān and Dārfūr were actually the source of the slaves which Nubia was obliged to supply to Egypt in accordance with the terms of the *bakt*. We do not know to what extent slave-trading was a state enterprise or rather an economic mainstay, or to what extent the areas of the western Sudan were colonized by the Nubians.

Dongola, Faras and other towns

The early eleventh-century town of Dongola, the capital of Nubia, was described by Abū Šāliḥ as follows: 'Here is the throne of the King. It is a large city on the banks of the blessed Nile, and contains many churches and large houses and wide streets. The King's house is lofty with several domes built of red-brick and resembles the buildings in Iraq.' The results of excavations seem to confirm this account. At the present time the town consists of a complex of ruins extending over an area of 35 hectares, in which the remains of the earlier buildings are concealed under the structures of the Muslim period (fifteenth to nineteenth centuries). To the north extends the Christian city including the complex of churches discovered by Polish archaeologists. Further northwards extends an eighth-ninth-century housing complex. The houses discovered here

differed in their hitherto unknown spatial layout as well as their amenities (water supply installation, bathroom with heating system) and interiors decorated with murals.

The turn of the eighth century is taken as the date of the monumental two-storeyed royal building, situated on a rocky spur to the east of the centre of the town. This building contained the king's throne hall on its representative storey, once decorated with murals. In 1317 it was converted by Sayf al-Din 'Abdallāh into a mosque, which was used for religious purposes until 1969. It is the only throne hall surviving intact in the whole of the area that had once been under the cultural influences of Byzantium and may have been modelled on the one that used to be in the great palace in Constantinople and is known only from descriptions.

We have, however, more precise data from the northern part of the kingdom (the former Nobadia) obtained during the major Unesco campaign to save the monuments of Nubia from being flooded by the waters of the Nubian Lake in the period from 1961 to 1966. Faras, with its splendid cathedral, churches, palaces and monasteries, retained its role as the religious centre. With the assumption of the episcopate by a Nubian, Kyros (866–902), whose splendid portrait decorates the walls of the Faras cathedral, Faras was raised to the status of a metropolitan bishopric.

Faras probably also remained a centre of administration, the seat of the eparch, who was also responsible for contacts between the kingdom and Egypt, as well as being the chief treasurer. The residence of the eparch was later transferred to the stronghold of Ḳaṣr Ibrīm.

Apart from the cathedral and the remains of its urban architecture, Ḳaṣr Ibrīm has provided a wealth of material discoveries and several hundred fragments of manuscript finds, among them ecclesiastical and literary writings, letters and documents.

Likewise of great importance was the vast town of Gebel Adda to the north of Faras on the eastern bank of the Nile. Both these towns were inhabited by several thousand residents, while other smaller centres such as Ḳurta, Kalābsha, Sabagura, Iḳhmīndī or Shayḳh Dāwūd had usually been fortified in the previous period and contained several hundred people each.

Economic and social conditions

Despite the wealth of archaeological remains, we know very little about many features of Nubian civilization. Investigated settlements present a picture of a prosperous and at the same time surprisingly free and egalitarian society, where differences in social status were not necessarily reflected in material culture. Small-scale farming continued to provide the basis of subsistence. Unlike in Egypt, farmers produced several crops a year, the chief of which were barley and millet. Dates were probably also of considerable economic importance. The farmers had originally kept cattle, sheep, donkeys and chickens while their livestock also later included pigs.

Most of the land was in smallholdings but in practice Nubians were rather tenant farmers, since, according to the law, all land was owned by the king. Taxation was based on land-tax (and possibly other taxes) and the clergy most probably served as tax-collectors. Presumably Nubian monasteries were also endowed with land estates for their support.



8.2 *The royal building in Old Dongola, converted to a mosque in 1317. (Photo: copyright Centre de recherches en archéologie méditerranéenne, Académie des sciences de la Pologne, Warsaw)*



8.3 Portrait of Kyros, the bishop of Faras (866–902): a mural from Faras cathedral. (Photo: copyright Centre de recherches en archéologie méditerranéenne, Académie des sciences de la Pologne, Warsaw)

The villages and small towns were largely self-sufficient and Nubian craftsmen supplied most of the articles in daily use. Among the articles produced in great quantities during this period, the most remarkable was finely decorated pottery, which was superior to contemporary Egyptian ware and not merely copied. The end of the eighth century saw the development of a new style in ceramics, decorated with bright colours and elaborate floral patterns and zoomorphic motifs. The classic Christian artistic canon shows much more resemblance to that of Meroitic times than it does to anything in the intervening five centuries. At some time during the eighth and early ninth centuries, there was a marked decrease in the amount of Egyptian pottery imported into Nubia, especially of amphorae produced in the Coptic monasteries of Upper Egypt. The accession to the throne of the Abbasid dynasty in Baghdad resulted in an increase in the persecution of the Copts and in the restrictions which were placed on Egyptian monasteries.

Many of the local centres were producing earthenware such as storage jars and cooking-pots or *kadūs* – a special vessel used on the *sākiya* (or water-wheel). The classic Christian pottery produced during the ninth and tenth centuries was sufficient to meet all the domestic needs of the country. It was only in the eleventh century that, alongside local products, imported ceramics from Egypt (the so-called Aswān ware) began to appear, together with glazed Arabic pottery which had never been copied in Nubia.

Another important industry of this period was weaving. The main products were made from wool or camel hair. Nubian woollen robes were mostly decorated with alternating stripes in bright colours or occasionally in a chequered design. Judging from the finds, one of the greatest weaving centres was undoubtedly Kaṣr Ibrīm.

Nubian craftsmen also manufactured iron implements (hoes, knives, etc.), as well as leather products and all kinds of matting, basketry and artistic plaited goods made from palm-fibre, the tradition of which has been maintained up to the present day.

Apart from these local products, the material culture indicates the use of many articles of foreign origin. In addition to items mentioned in the *bakt* treaty (wheat, barley, wine, but also linen, cloth and ready garments), Nubia imported all sorts of glass vessels from Egypt.

Trade in Nubia was largely carried out through the system of barter. There was no monetary system, with the exception of the northern parts of Nubia, where Egyptian coins were used in trading with the Arabs. Thus in foreign trade Nubia was compelled to pay with money but internal financial dealings were forbidden, as is shown by the strict border (in reality a customs frontier-post) established in Upper Maḳs ('Akāṣha) in the Baṭn al-Ḥadjar area and separating the foreign trade zone from the heart of the country, where foreign trade was under the king's strict control. Nubia's exports consisted mainly of slaves but the traditional products of gold, ivory and skins must have played no mean role in foreign trade. The Dongola region must also have been in contact, through Kordofān and Dārḫūr, with merchants operating trade routes in the countries of the western Sudan.

Political history from the ninth century

In the third decade of the ninth century Nubia took advantage of a dynastic crisis in the Caliphate to stop paying the *bakt*. However, as soon as al-Mu'taṣim became

Caliph, he requested the king of Dongola, Zacharia, not only to resume payment of the annual tribute but also to repay all arrears. The king, unable to meet the demand, sent his son and successor Georgios to Baghdad to negotiate with the Caliph (in 835). The meeting of a Nubian prince with the Caliph was an unprecedented event and signified a great political success for the Christian Nubian kingdom. The embassy resulted in a bilateral treaty revising the terms of the *baḳt*, which was thereafter payable only once in three years.

During the long reign of Georgios I (c. 856–915) serious disturbances broke out as a result of the expedition of the Arab gold-pro prospector Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-'Umārī, who with his private army took over the gold-mines near Abū Hāmād for some time. After a prolonged campaign, beset by intrigues among the members of the Nubian royal family who commanded the Nubian army, al-'Umārī was forced to withdraw into the Bēdja country, where he was eventually killed.

The expedition of al-'Umārī was not an expression of official Egyptian policy towards Nubia, but it does, however, substantiate the fact that the Arabs were endeavouring to penetrate far into Nubia with, no doubt, as in the conflict with the Bēdja, the purpose of ensuring the flow of gold from the south into Egypt.

The tenth century in Nubia seems to have been a period of prosperity in the country, as it had been during the second half of the previous century. This prosperity was apparently disturbed only by the great flood of the Nile, which led to the resettlement of the population in some regions of Nobadia. However, the Nubian state, with its firm economic foundations, succeeded in overcoming these difficulties.

In 956 Nubia was again at daggers drawn with Egypt. This time, however, it was not the Arabs who were the aggressors but the Nubians, who raided and plundered Aswān. The Egyptian punitive expedition advanced as far as Ḳaṣr Ibrīm but was not very successful.

In 962 the Nubians occupied a large part of Upper Egypt as far as Akḥmim. This incursion no doubt resulted from the situation prevailing in Egypt during the time of the last Ikhshidids (936–68) and could have been intended to bring about the victory of the Fāṭimids in that country, with whom later Nubia retained good relations.

The Nubian occupation of Egypt did not cease with the coming to power of the Fāṭimid Caliphate in 969, and perhaps the frontiers of the occupied area were only redefined so that Edfu still remained within Nubia. Until the middle of the eleventh century, this city was an important centre of Nubian culture. Most of our information for this period is based on the writings of Ibn Sālim al-Aswānī, who, in about 969, was entrusted with a mission to the Nubian ruler Georgios II. The king accorded the Arab embassy a warm reception. However, as Nubia was then a powerful state, the king was in a position to refuse both the payment of tribute as stipulated by the *baḳt* and the demand to convert to Islam.

In the tenth century, the Church in Nubia played a significant role in the affairs of the country; this is confirmed by the fact that, when the Arab embassy came to Dongola at the time of Georgios II, the ruler called a council composed of bishops to decide on the reply to be given to the Arabs. The king was later to act as an intermediary in purely ecclesiastical affairs as in the case where he interceded, at the request of the Ethiopian authorities, with the Patriarch Philotheos (979–1003) concerning the

appointment of an appropriate metropolitan for Ethiopia.

From among seven of the Nubian bishoprics known from Arab sources, five – Kurta, Kaṣr Ibrīm, Faras, Sai and Dongola – have been confirmed by archaeological discoveries. The most complete data concerning the history of a bishopric are those available in the case of Faras, where, thanks to the list of bishops inscribed on one of the cathedral walls, tombstones and graffiti, it has been possible to establish an unbroken chronological sequence of the dignitaries of the church in this diocese since the time of its founding in the seventh century up to 1175.

The Monophysite character of the Nubian Church is attested by numerous data concerning Faras and other dioceses; on the other hand, the evidence from Faras suggests some variation in allegiance at the close of the tenth century when we find simultaneously two bishops on the episcopal throne of Pachoras: Petros I (974–99) and Ioannes III (997–1005). A reasonable explanation for this may be that Ioannes represents a confession other than that of the Monophysite Petros, the Metropolitan of Faras, i.e. the Greek (or Melkite) faith.

It seems that the Melkites profited greatly from the favour shown to them in Egypt by the Fāṭimid Caliph Al-ʿAzīz and succeeded in their efforts to reclaim some of the sees in Nubia. Two successors of Ioannes on the episcopal throne in Faras, Marianos (1005–36) and Merkurios (1037–56), were called in inscriptions ‘his sons’ – which expression can be understood to mean that they shared the same confession.

Not much is known about the nature of the liturgy in Nubia. Greek probably remained the most important language in the Church and was at the same time a sort of lingua franca in the whole Christian world of that period. Alongside Greek, the Coptic language was also extensively used in church writings, for official inscriptions and on tombstones.

From the mid-tenth century onwards Nubia revealed a considerable increase in the number of texts in the indigenous language Old Nubian (otherwise called Medieval Nubian), which is ancestral to the modern Mahas dialect of riverain Nubian and belongs to the group of eastern Sudanic languages. Old Nubian is written in the Coptic alphabet (itself an adaptation of the Greek one), with the addition of four signs for specific Nubian sounds.

The earliest dated text attested in Old Nubian is a graffito left in 795 in the church of al-Sebūʿa by one Petro, a priest from Faras. The textual material in Old Nubian is mostly religious in character, but it also contains extraordinarily rich material in the form of legal documents and letters found recently in Kaṣr Ibrīm. All this material is of the greatest importance not only from historical and religious standpoints but also for linguistics, because Old Nubian lexicography and grammar are by no means sufficiently elaborated and the newly discovered texts remain largely unpublished.

Not much historical material is available for the eleventh century. Nubia was again involved in the affairs of Egypt, when at the beginning of the century a defeated rebel against the Fāṭimids, Abū Raḳwa, fled to Nubia and was pursued by the Caliphal army. In general, however, during the long period of the Fāṭimid rule in Egypt (969–1169), the two countries were at peace and maintained friendly relations. The Nubians were even being recruited into the Fāṭimid army, where their number had increased to 50,000 by the end of the century.

Some Nubian kings intervened successfully on behalf of the Monophysite Patriarchate of Alexandria, which was from time to time persecuted by Fāṭimid viziers; this in turn brought about a reinforcement of the Monophysite Church in Nubia, where it was for some time in danger of losing its position as state religion.

With the fall of the Fāṭimids (1169), relations between Nubia and Egypt rapidly deteriorated and Nubia's golden age came to an end almost at the same period. Armed encounters with the troops of the Ayyubid Sultan Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (Saladīn) opened the next part of Nubia's history, which is known as the Late Christian period.

Arts and architecture

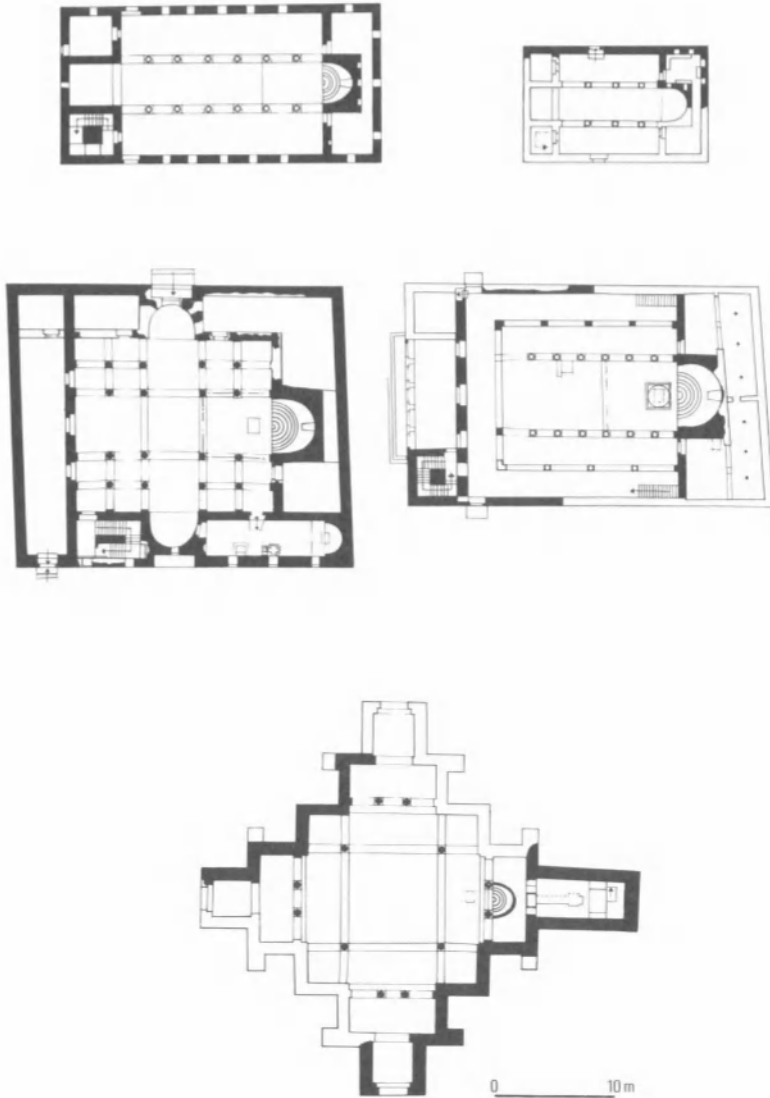
The tenth and eleventh centuries in Nubia represented an extremely favourable period for the development of arts and architecture.

The material which we possess is very rich. There are over 120 churches known from Nobadia and about 40 in Makuria. For a long time it was held that Nubian sacral architecture was derived only from the 'basilican' type of church which was, in fact, the predominant type in the north. It now appears that there were two equally important tendencies in sacral architecture: the central design and the elongated basilican pattern, both of which exerted an influence on individual church edifices. The main trends in architecture can primarily be seen in the great structures created in cultural and administrative centres like Old Dongola, Faras or Ḳaṣr Ibrīm. The provincial architecture is modelled on them to a certain extent, but, since only limited possibilities as to execution and material were available, it created the so-called 'typical Nubian plan' of church mainly encountered in northern Nubia in the Classic Christian and Late periods. In this type most of the local internal features can be seen.

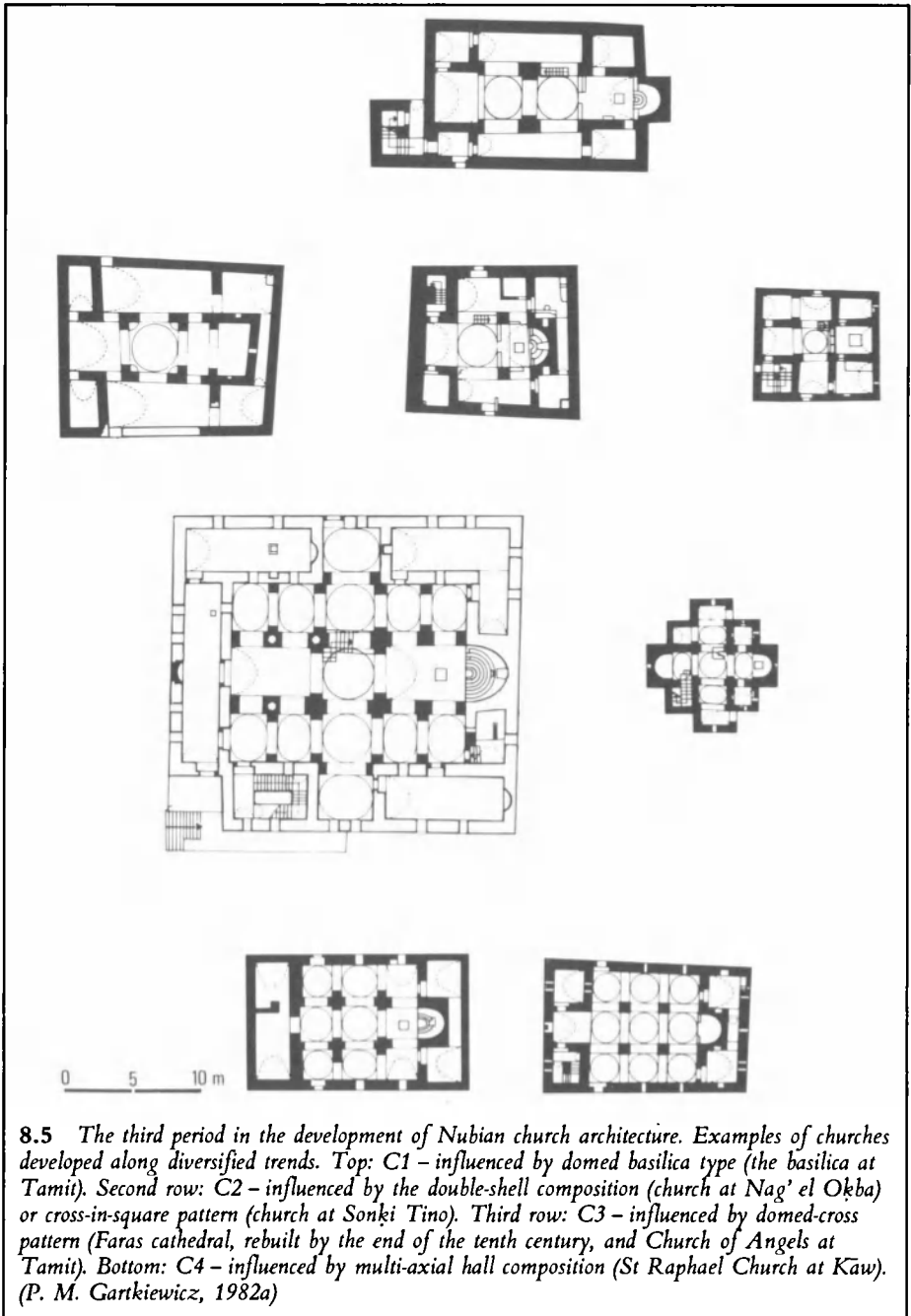
We can distinguish several periods in the development of Nubian sacral architecture. At the beginning of the first period, foreign, chiefly Coptic, influence was most marked and churches were based on the elongated, uniaxial, three-aisled plan, being built of mud-brick and covered with wooden ceilings. In a later phase, great cathedrals built of ashlar stone or burnt-brick were erected following the same plan. The tradition of mud-brick building was still continued in smaller edifices and it was during this phase that the typical Nubian church already described came to be developed.

In the second period, the evolution of types of churches, combined with Armenian and Byzantine architectural influences, completely transformed the conception of spatial form in buildings. During this period two tendencies were developed: whilst the traditional style was maintained in the provinces, a new and official mode of building characterized by a central plan made its appearance in the capital. Burnt-brick was widely used. Nubian architecture reached the climax of its creative possibilities. One of the best examples of the original conceptions of the Nubian architects is the mausoleum (cruciform church) in Old Dongola, based on the plan of a Greek cross. Dongola became in this period the main centre of architectural activities.

In the third period, it is not possible to distinguish any main stream of continuation in the progressive line of development. Building activities were dispersed in several centres and absorbed various influences, mainly of Byzantine origin. The general common feature of that time was the introduction of the domed covering sometime towards



8.4 The second period in the development of Nubian church architecture. Top: the traditional (conservative) provincial building (B2); monastery church in *Ghazāli* and the church on the south slope of the *Kom* in *Faras*. Middle: the progressive line, main trend, first phase (A3); example of the spatial arrangement and central (church of the granite columns in Old Dongola) or longitudinal plan (the great cathedral, *Kaṣr Ibrīm*). Bottom: example of the main trend, second phase (A4), the mausoleum in Old Dongola, a cruciform church. (P. M. Gartkiewicz, 1982a)



the end of the tenth century. Both the elongated (basilican) and the central plan churches were then transformed by the addition of domes in the central part and the replacement of columns with brick piers. Mud-brick was again commonly used. Beside the rebuilding of the older churches, new ones were being erected, in a form resulting from various simplifications and local mutations of Nubian solutions.

At the end of the eighth century, the standard decoration of the interior of sacral buildings became figurative mural painting. The set of paintings from Faras contains – apart from the many representations of Christ and the Virgin Mary – saints and archangels, scenes from the Old and New Testament, and also portraits of local dignitaries presented under the protection of holy figures.

Material from Faras has made it possible to distinguish and place in chronological order the various stylistic groups of early painting. Murals of this early period inspired a new generation of local Nubian artists, who in the tenth century created their own school of painting whose most characteristic features are decorative forms where the foreign elements, strangely transformed, produced a kind of ornamentation that was specific to Nubia and a selection of colours that was characteristic of each period. Thus, at the beginning of the tenth century, after the replastering of the cathedral interior, a new style called yellow-red was developed. After the major reconstruction of the Faras cathedral which occurred at the end of the tenth century, the multicoloured style was created. This is one of the most widespread styles in northern Nubia and is attested in several churches, such as those of 'Abdallāh Nirki, Sonki Tino and Tamit. One outstanding example of this new art is the portrait of Bishop Marianos painted in the opening years of the eleventh century. The great composition of the nativity, now in the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum, comes from the same period. It is the largest mural painted in Nubia and clearly shows that the Nubian artists mastered scenes with many figures placed on several superimposed planes. The multicoloured style was continued until the end of the Christian period in Nubia.

In general in the Nubian painting of the Classic Christian period one can see the predominant influence of Byzantine art (especially in the profusion of ornamentation), which did not wholly replace the Coptic elements prevailing in the earlier periods. The main expression of this art exhibits purely local features characteristic of Nubian painting alone.

This branch of art in Nubia indicates a profound knowledge of the earliest traditions of Christian thought and the text of the Holy Scriptures. Nubia in its golden period remained an important arm of Christian *oikumene*. Through its contacts (as visible at least in local art and architecture) not only with the Copts in Egypt and most probably with Ethiopia, but also with the entire sphere of Byzantine culture from Armenia to Syria and Palestine, it drew inspiration from all these sources, forming its own separate cultural personality.



8.6 *View of the north transept of Faras cathedral with the great mural of the nativity in multicoloured I style, painted c. 1000. (Photo: copyright Centre de recherches en archéologie méditerranéenne, Académie des sciences de la Pologne, Warsaw)*



The conquest of North Africa and Berber resistance

The Berbers on the eve of the Arab conquest

In Volume II the reader will have had an initial glimpse of the Berbers, their origins, their ethnic structure and some of their characteristics. However, as this is the first chapter to deal with the Maghrib (Islamic North Africa exclusive of Egypt), it may be useful at this point to acquaint the reader with the Berbers as the Arabs found them at the time of the Arab conquest of the Maghrib, from 642 onwards. At this time the Berbers were organized, like the Arabs themselves, in *ḳabīlas*. These *ḳabīlas* were divided into two blocs: the Butr and the Barānis.

Ibn *Ḳhaldūn*, the historian of the Berbers, wrote that the Berbers had been divided into two blocs since time immemorial, and that their mutual hostility and incessant quarrelling had been the dominant factor throughout their history both before and after the advent of Islam.

A classification into two great groups probably does reflect the feelings of the Berber population of the Maghrib themselves as regards their respective ancestries. It would seem that Berber and Arab genealogists constructed this division *a posteriori*, but in so doing took into account the facts of historical experience.

At the time of the Arab conquest, the main Butr tribal confederations were those of the Zanāta, the Maṭḡhara and the Nafzāwa. The Zanāta seem to have enjoyed supremacy over the others, as they are said to have given their name to all the nomadic Butr tribes.

As regards the Barānis, their most important confederations of *ḳabīlas* at the time of the conquest were the Awrāba, the Hawwāra and the Ṣanhādja.

However, as soon as we move on to study the Arab conquest and the history of North Africa under Islamic domination, we find new *ḳabīlas* and ethnic groupings emerging that prove to have been more important than those mentioned above.

To avoid inaccuracy we shall restrict ourselves to a broad outline of the Berbers' ethnic divisions at the time of the Arab conquest and afterwards, up to the twelfth century.

At the time of the Arab conquest, the Barānis were divided into a number of large groups such as the Ṣanhādja, Kutāma, Talkāta, Awrāba and Maṣmūda. The Zanāta (or Zanatians) inhabited Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, extending southward as far as Fezzān,

the predominant confederations of *ḵabīlas* being those of the Hawwāra, Luwāta, Nafūsa and Zaghāwa.

These groups also ruled the eastern part of what is now Algeria, an area known during the Arab period as the al-Mzāb region. They occupied the pasture-lands on the northern slopes of the Central Atlas mountains as far as the Mulūya river. This was the homeland of that great group of *ḵabīlas* known as the Miknāsa, who extended southward as far as the fertile region of the Tafīlālet oases.

The Kutāma and the Ṣanhādja inhabited the central Maghrib, including the Awrās massif and the Ḵabā'il country (Grande Kabylie), living in the regions around Tāhert and Tlemcen. This was the common homeland of a number of great groups: the Kutāma, who contributed to the establishment of the Fātimid Caliphate; the Talkāta, founders of the two Zīrīd emirates; and the Awrāba, who played a major role in the foundation of the Idrīsīd emirate in northern Morocco. Ibn Ḵhaldūn calls these Ṣanhādja *ḵabīlas* of central Morocco 'the first generation of Ṣanhādja'. There were other small enclaves of Ṣanhādja in the western Maghrib, the largest being that of the Haskūra, who lived in the High Atlas, in Masmūda country: the Ṣanhādja later joined forces with the Masmūda, merging with them to create the Almohaḍ empire.

A further group of Ṣanhādja inhabited an area stretching from the desert land south of Wādī Dar'a (Oued Dra) to the strip of the Sahara lying along the Atlantic coast as far as the Senegal river. Their most important *ḵabīlas* were the Lamtūna, Massūfa, Djuddāla, Gazūla (Djazūla), Banū Wārith, Lamṭa and Ṭarka. These last were, in fact, the famous Tuareg (al-Ṭawāriḵ), who have remained the lords of the great Sahara right down to our own day. All these groups were camel-breeding nomads. Ibn Ḵhaldūn calls this Ṣanhādja group 'the second generation of Ṣanhādja'.

However, the most important Barānis group was that of the Masmūda or Masāmīda. They controlled practically the whole of the western Maghrib with the exception of a few small enclaves of Ṣanhādja and Zanāta. The most important branches of this group were the Ghumāra (in the Tangier region and throughout the Rīf), and the Barghwāta, who ruled the Sebū valley along with the Awrāba. The Masāmīda inhabited the mountainous regions of the High Atlas and Anti-Atlas ranges and the fertile plain of Sūs, which stretches between the two Atlas ranges to the south of the Sirwa massif. These were the founders of the Almohaḍ religious movement and empire, which subsequently united the Maghrib and Spain. Among the larger *ḵabīlas* included in the group were the Hintāta, Haylāna (or Aylāna), Urīka, Hazardja, Masfiwa, Dughāgha, Hargha, Ahl-Tin mallal, Sawda, Ganfīsa, Banū Wawazgit, Fatwāka and Mastāna.

The above, of course, is only a very brief survey of the Berbers and their ethnic groups at the time of the Arabs' arrival in North Africa. Some resisted the Arabs, while others rallied to them and were converted to Islam during the long period of conquest.

Doubtless there is no need to remind the reader that virtually all these groups were of traditional religion. The Arab historians call them *Mādjūs*, i.e. 'fire-worshippers', but this term usually means simply pagans in general.

Christianity had not become widespread among the Berbers; only the inhabitants of the coastal belt, the people called *al-Afāriḵa* by the Arabs, were Christian. The *Afāriḵa* were a marginal people, a mixture of Romanized Berbers and Carthaginians, Romans and Greeks. Among the Berbers properly so called, the spread of Christianity

was slight. Moreover, the Christians of Byzantine Africa were divided by schisms; for these Berbers, Christianity had long been a source of unity against Roman domination, and they had ardently embraced such heresies as Arianism and Donatism, which stood in opposition to the doctrine of the Church of Rome.

Judaism too had made many converts, and, although it never played the role some writers have attributed to it, it had nevertheless spread throughout North Africa. The majority of native-born North African Jews are descended from those converted prior to the advent of Islam.

The conquest of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania

In the year 641, the Treaty of Alexandria was concluded between 'Amr Ibn al-'Āṣ and the Patriarch Cyrus, the last Byzantine governor of Egypt, ratifying the conquest of his territory by the Arabs. Shortly thereafter, on 17 September 642, the last Byzantine garrison evacuated Alexandria.

But 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, the conqueror of Egypt, thought it necessary to annex Cyrenaica (Barḡa) as well. Since the last reorganization of the empire by the Emperor Maurice (582-602), Cyrenaica had in fact belonged to the province of Egypt, as had Tripolitania. 'Amr marched on Cyrenaica at the beginning of 643, and seized it almost without meeting any resistance.

He found neither Greeks nor *Rūm* (Byzantines) to oppose him, only Berbers of the Luwāta and Hawwāra groups. These, surrendering, agreed to pay an annual tribute of 13,000 dinars, which henceforth constituted part of the tribute payable by Egypt.

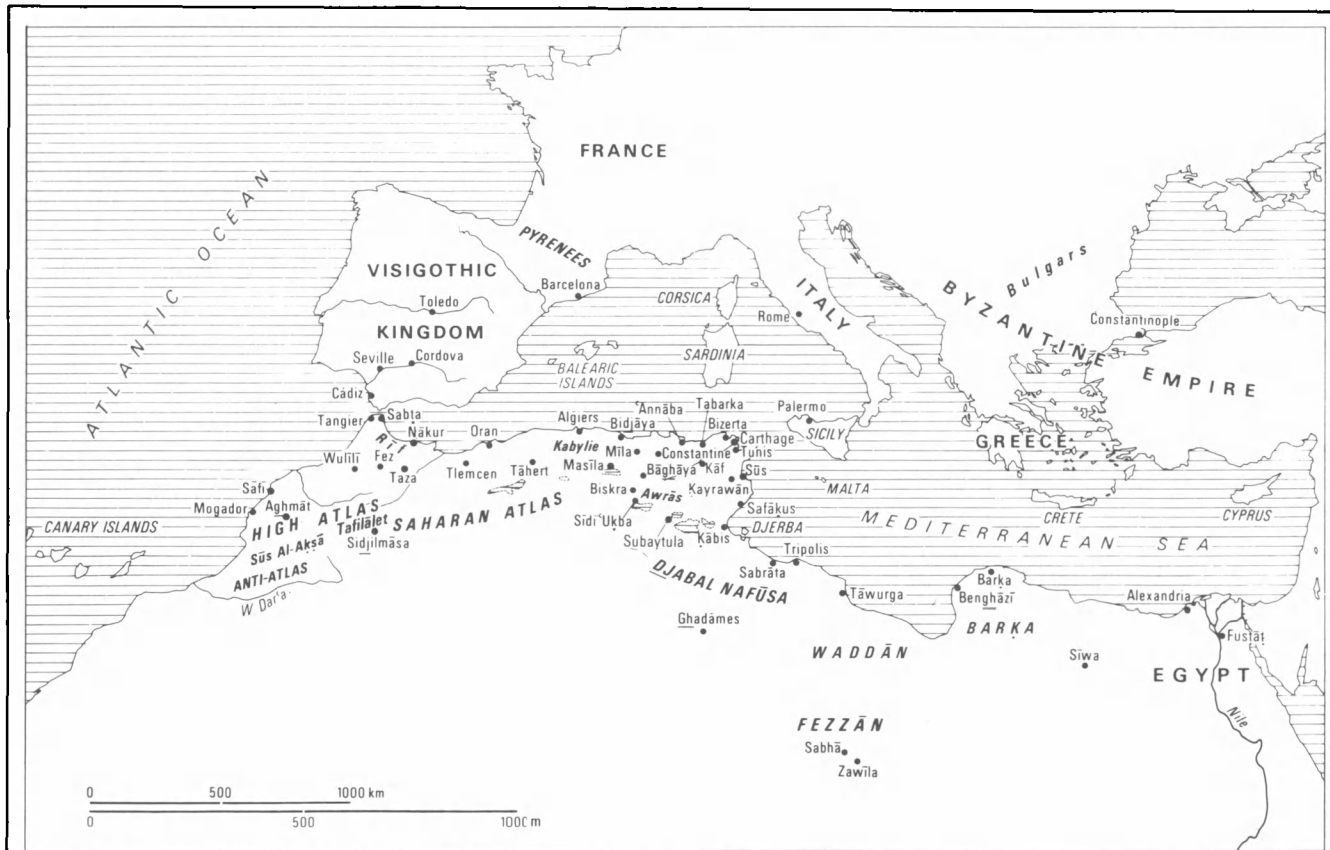
At the same time, 'Amr sent his lieutenant Nāfi' ibn 'Abd al-Ḳays to occupy Zawīla, a small oasis between Cyrenaica and Fezzān, a very important watering-place on the route to the south.

A year later, Arab troops under 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ returned to continue the conquest of North Africa. Their objective was Tripoli, which was an integral part of Byzantine Egypt. 'Amr captured Tripoli after a brief siege and shortly afterwards his army attacked Sabra or Sabrāta, and took Waddān, the largest oasis in the hinterland of Tripoli. The occupation of Waddān effectively meant the annexation of the whole mountain region of Nafūsa, the bastion of the Nafūsa confederation of *ḳabīlas*.

'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ had thus put the finishing touches to his conquest of Egypt. The western frontiers of his province were secured. Beyond those frontiers lay the Byzantine province of Byzacena, corresponding approximately to modern Tunisia.

The first incursion into Ifrīḳiya

In the year 647, 'Abd Allāh ibn Sa'd, the new governor of Egypt, led an expedition into Byzacena at the head of an élite army of 20,000 horsemen. The governor of Byzantine Africa was the Exarch Gregory, who a few years earlier had proclaimed himself independent, abandoned Carthage for the interior and was entrenched in a stronghold called Suffetula. When the Arab troops had reached Tripoli, he gathered a large army; a fierce battle fought not far from Suffetula, which the Arabs call Sbeitla (Subaytula), ended in a decisive Arab victory. The Exarch Gregory was killed, his daughter captured



9.1 The Arab conquest of the Maghrib. (I. Hrbek)

along with many members of his household, and Sbeitla occupied. The remaining *Rūm* fled to Carthage, Sūs (Hadrumetum) and other ports and many left Africa with no hope of returning.

After the victory, Arab columns carried out raids in all directions across the country. They took thousands of prisoners, to the extent that the population appealed to 'Abd Allāh ibn Sa'd, asking him to accept a substantial ransom as the price of his departure. He agreed, took the ransom and left the country. The campaign ended early in the year 649.

The second stage of the conquest

These campaigns by 'Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ and 'Abd Allāh ibn Sa'd may be regarded as the preliminary or preparatory stages of the conquest of North Africa.

By now the Arabs had some knowledge of the country and its inhabitants; a permanent garrison occupied Barḳa and a smaller one was established at Waddān.

But all the Muslims' projects for conquest were paralysed for nearly twelve years as a result of the civil war which raged among the Arabs between the middle of 'Uthmān's Caliphate (644-56) and the accession of Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān to the Caliphate in 661.

As soon as peace was restored within the Arab empire, Mu'āwiya, founder of the Umayyad dynasty, decreed that conquest should be pressed forward on all fronts. In 663, he appointed 'Uḳba ibn 'Amīr al-Djuhanī to the post of governor of Egypt, and entrusted Mu'āwiya ibn Hudaydj al-Sākunī with the command of the Arab army which was to resume the conquest of the Maghrib.

During this period, circumstances worked to the Arabs' advantage in Africa. Profiting from the Arabs' long absence, the Byzantines had tried to re-establish their own authority there. A new exarch, the patrician Nicephorus, wished to extract from the province an amount in tax revenue equal to the ransom paid to the Arabs. Since the people refused, as they were quite unable to produce such a sum, tension built up and led, inevitably, to armed confrontation. At this point, in 665, the army of Mu'āwiya ibn Hudaydj appeared on the horizon; he easily defeated Nicephorus, forcing him to take refuge within the walls of Hadrumetum (Sūs). But in a short time the Arabs captured Sūs and forced Nicephorus to flee. The Muslims then took in quick succession Djalūla (Cululis), Bizerta and the island of Djerba. In 666, they even ventured for the first time to undertake an incursion against the coast of Sicily.

In 670, the Caliph Mu'āwiya dismissed Ibn Hudaydj and appointed 'Uḳba ibn Nāfi' as commander-in-chief of the Arab forces in North Africa. This appointment was to prove decisive for the conquest.

Setting out from Waddān, 'Uḳba undertook a long expedition, going by way of Fezzān and the south of Kawār as far as the borders of what is today the Republic of Chad. He took care to firmly establish the authority of Islam, building mosques and leaving garrisons and missionaries; then he moved north again as far as Ghadāmes. He began by attacking the last Byzantine strongholds standing between Gabès (Kābis) and the place where he had decided to establish what was to be both a military base and the political centre (*miṣr*) of his province. Without delay, he set about the task of

founding his capital, which he called *Ḳayrawān*, meaning 'camp' or 'arsenal'.

With the founding of *Ḳayrawān*, one of the oldest and most venerable cities of Islam, the first Islamic province of North Africa was born. It was given the name of Africa (*Ifrikiya*). At the time, it covered more or less the same area as present-day Tunisia.

'Uḳba began to prepare a new campaign, but in 675 he was relieved of his command. His successor, *Dīnār ibn Abū al-Muhād̲j̲ir*, who held the post from 675 to 682, proved to be one of the most brilliant men ever to direct the Arab conquest of the Maghrib. In the mean time the situation had shifted slightly to the disadvantage of the Arabs. Already the Byzantine emperor Constantine IV (Pogonatus) had emerged victorious from the first major Arab attack and the siege of Constantinople which they had undertaken during the reign of the first Umayyad Caliph, *Mu'āwiya*. Constantine decided to take advantage of this victory to recover part of his lost territory. He retook Cyprus and some of the Aegean islands, and dispatched emissaries to re-establish contact with such Byzantines as remained in Carthage and other parts of the former province. The envoys then won over to the Byzantine cause the most powerful contemporary Berber leader, *Kusayla*, chief of the *Awrāba* and of the *Ṣanhād̲j̲a* confederation of *ḳabīlas*, which ruled the whole of the central Maghrib.

Abū al-Muhād̲j̲ir succeeded in winning *Kusayla*'s confidence, assuring him that if he accepted the faith and rallied to its cause he and all his clan would become full members of the Muslim community.

Kusayla and all his tribesmen therefore embraced the Islamic faith. The year was 678, a memorable date in the history of the Islamization of the Maghrib. The following year, *Abū al-Muhād̲j̲ir*, with the help of his powerful ally, conquered the peninsula known today as *Ik̲l̲ībiyya*, attacked Carthage, capturing *Mila*, a key stronghold of the Byzantines situated a short distance north of *Cirta* (modern Constantine).

Shortly afterwards, *Abū al-Muhād̲j̲ir* was recalled and 'Uḳba reappointed governor of *Ifrikiya*. This second appointment of 'Uḳba *ibn Nāfi*' was unquestionably the most important event in the Arab conquest of North Africa. On assuming office, 'Uḳba declared his intention of opening up the whole of the Maghrib to Islam and immediately marched from *Ḳayrawān* with 15,000 horsemen and several thousand of *Kusayla*'s Berbers.

In a short time the Muslim army, penetrating into the *Awrās* Mountains, achieved considerable success by taking many towns, such as *Bāgh̲h̲āya* and *Masila*, and by defeating the local Berber groups. Even a great coalition, formed by the *Luwāta*, *Hawwāra*, *Matmāta*, *Zanāta* and *Miknāsa* from the central Maghrib, was not able to stop 'Uḳba's victorious march and suffered a crushing defeat near *Tiāret* (*Tāhert*).

This victory gave 'Uḳba a reputation for invincibility. Impressed by these deeds, thousands of Berbers converted to Islam and joined his army *en masse*. But 'Uḳba now committed a serious political blunder: against the advice of *Abū al-Muhād̲j̲ir* he invaded and looted the region around *Tlemcen*, the home of *Kusayla* and his *Awrāba*, although they were already Muslims and their chief an ally. *Kusayla* was naturally infuriated, but he postponed his revenge to a more opportune time.

In the next stage of his campaign, 'Uḳba criss-crossed the present-day Morocco and subdued many Berber groups, penetrating as far south as *Wādī Dar'a* and *Tafilālet* and founding mosques at many places. He reached the Atlantic coast at *Sāfi*, north of

Mogador, near the village of Ighiran-Yattūf (Cap Guir). There, according to legend, he rode on horseback into the sea, saying he had reached the end of the world fighting for God, and that if he could proceed no further it was because there was no more land to be brought into the fold of Islam.

But the return march was a tragic one. The men were exhausted, and after so long an expedition they were impatient to see their families again; 'Uḳba allowed those who wished to hurry on ahead, and in the end he was left with only 5,000 men. This was the moment Kusayla had been waiting for to take his revenge. As they were passing through the Tlemcen region, his homeland, he abandoned 'Uḳba's camp and hastened into the very midst of the Atlas Mountains, where he contacted the Christians who had taken refuge there, and made an agreement with them to await 'Uḳba on a plain near Tahūḍha, to the south of Biskra. 'Uḳba found himself surrounded by some 50,000 men. He displayed a degree of valour worthy of his reputation: dismounting together with Abū al-Muhād̄jir and the rest of his companions he hurled himself upon the enemy and met his death. Almost all his men were killed (August 683). The tragic end made the Arab general a saint and martyr (*mud̄jahid*) and Sīdī 'Uḳba's tomb became the most venerated holy place in all North Africa.

The tragic news alarmed the whole of the Maghrib. In Ḳayrawān, the Muslims were panic-stricken; the garrison left in haste and hurried eastwards. Kusayla marched on Ḳayrawān and seized it. He did not abjure the Islamic faith but simply proclaimed himself governor.

For the first time in history Ifrīḳiya was governed by a man of pure Berber stock: Kusayla, chief of the Awrāba.

The beginnings of Berber resistance

'Uḳba's campaign had one very important side-effect: the Berbers realized that the Arab attack was directed against them, not merely against the Byzantines. It was now clear that the aim of the Arabs was to absorb the Berbers and Berber territory into their empire and their religious community. Although the general Berber population had no objection to adopting Islam, their chiefs were unwilling to let themselves be absorbed into the empire of a foreign power. Kusayla's victory is the first demonstration of this feeling; he became a friend and ally to the Arab governor Abū al-Muhād̄jir, but he refused to become subject to a foreign power. On the other hand, the Umayyads were not prepared to grant sovereignty over the new province to a non-Arab local chieftain, even if the latter was a Muslim.

In 688 the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik (685–705) appointed Zuhayr ibn Ḳays to command the troops destined to renew Arab domination in the Maghrib.

Kusayla, who had built up a Berber kingdom covering the Awrās, the area south of Constantine and the greater part of Ifrīḳiya (687–90), felt insecure in Ḳayrawān when he learned that the new Arab army was on its way. He decided to await the enemy at Mamma, a small village inhabited by the Hawwāra, lying between Ḳayrawān and Lāribus.

The battle of Mamma was decisive. The Arabs defeated the Berbers (690), Kusayla was killed and his men suffered heavy losses. The Awrāba, at that time one of the most

powerful Berber clans, were utterly crushed. Abandoning the area around Tlemcen they settled to the north of Sebū, around the town of Wulīlī (Volubilis).

Zuhayr did not enjoy his victory for very long; a Byzantine fleet, seizing the opportunity afforded by the Arabs' war against Kusayla, landed at Barḳa and occupied it. Zuhayr marched against them with his vanguard, followed by the rest of the army, but was killed in the battle. It was four years before the Caliph was able to send into Ifrīkiya fresh contingents under a new governor, Ḥassān ibn al-Nu'mān, who raised a large army and appropriated Egypt's tax revenues in their entirety to cover the costs of his new expedition; his aim was to complete the conquest of the Maghrib once and for all.

Ḥassān's first objective was to defeat the Byzantines and so prevent any alliance between them and the Berbers. After reaching Ḳayrawān, he marched on Carthage and destroyed its port in order to make it unusable for Byzantine ships. Most of the Byzantines fled to the islands of the Mediterranean. There was violent fighting around Istafūra (or Satfūra) and on the peninsula where Hippo Diarhytus (Bizerta), Hippo Regius (Bône, now 'Annāba) and Tabarka stood; all of these Byzantine colonies and fortresses fell to the Arabs.

Having accomplished this much, Ḥassān considered his military tasks completed, and set about organizing the territory, but before long a new danger emerged: a Berber woman whom the Arabs called *al-Kāhina*, 'the priestess' or 'the prophetess', chief of the Djarāwa *ḳabila* in the Awrās mountains, had assembled all the Zanāta of the region and announced she would throw the Arabs out of Ifrīkiya. A fearsome woman, half queen, half sorceress, al-Kāhina – for it is under this Arab name that she has gone down in history – is one of those curious figures around whom legends grow up.

As the chief of a large Zanāta *ḳabila*, she had been very much disturbed by the unexpected victory of Kusayla, the Ṣanhādja chieftain who had imposed his rule over the region bordering on her own. Now that the Arab newcomers had defeated the Ṣanhādja and threatened to extend their domination to the whole of the Maghrib, her fears increased, and she determined to defy the Arab intruders.

Ḥassan immediately went on the offensive against his new enemy. Al-Kāhina expected the Arabs to try to seize Bāghāya, which would have served as a good base from which to attack her in the Awrās; and so she occupied the town without delay, thus cutting off the route into the interior.

In 696 Ḥassān launched his attack and the Djarāwa threw themselves on the Arabs so fiercely that the latter were driven back, leaving behind hundreds of dead and some eighty prisoners. Ḥassān beat a retreat to Barḳa. Al-Kāhina, satisfied with her victory, withdrew into the mountains instead of marching on Ḳayrawān.

Thinking that the Arabs were interested only in plunder, she adopted a 'scorched earth' policy and had all the standing crops destroyed between the Awrās and Ifrīkiya. This action turned the sedentary *ḳabilas* against her, and Ḥassān was asked to come to their assistance. The following year, in 697, the situation further deteriorated; the Byzantine emperor Leon (695–8) sent out a fleet which sacked Carthage and killed many of the Muslims there.

The Caliph 'Abd al-Malik, tired of the interminable struggle for Africa, had decided to strike a decisive blow. The army with which Ḥassān marched against

al-Kāhina was the largest ever seen in the region, the Arab troops being reinforced by thousands of Berbers.

The final battle between Ḥassān and al-Kāhina took place in 701. The queen was killed and her followers routed. The Berbers of the Awrās immediately asked for amnesty, which they were granted on condition that they supply men to fight in the Arab armies. Twelve thousand men were sent to Ḥassān, who placed them under the command of the defeated queen's two sons. All these fighting men, including the two princes, adopted the Islamic faith.

To make sure that the Byzantines would never be able to return, Ḥassān gave orders for the total destruction of Carthage. The work was done in 702; the tale of this city, so glorious in its day, was at an end.

Instead, Ḥassān founded a new port at the site of ancient Tarshīsh, now called Tunis; in later years it became an important maritime and commercial centre of the province of Ifrīkiya.

This province included the Tripolitania (Ṭarābulus) region, Ifrīkiya proper, from Gabès to 'Annāba, and the Mzāb region from 'Annāba to the upper reaches of the Chélif river, south of Algiers. West of the Chélif stretched the central Maghrib, and beyond that the western Maghrib; these, in theory, were part of the Islamic empire but no effective Arab administration was established in these regions at this time.

Ḥassān organized his province of Ifrīkiya along the lines of the administrative system in force throughout the Islamic empire. At the head of each province stood a governor ('*āmīl*), who himself chose a vice-governor (*wāli*) for each district. Taxes were levied at a rate of approximately 10% on personal income. In Ifrīkiya, where there were almost no Jews or Christians on whom to levy capitation tax (*djizya*), this particular source of revenue, so important elsewhere, was presumably almost non-existent.

Ifrīkiya was similar to Arabia in that both had a tribal type of social organization. The government imposed a tax of about 2% of each *ḵabila*'s collective wealth in the form of camels and sheep. This was the *ṣadāka*, and the tax-collector was known as the *muṣaddīḵ*. However, since the government had to appoint a judge (*ḵādī*) for each ethnic group and to send missionaries or teachers to instruct the population in the principles of Islam and to preside over prayers, hardly any revenue was raised from the *ḵabīlas*, as these various state functionaries were paid out of *ṣadāḵāt* contributions.

Ḥassān, at any rate, endowed his province with a sound administrative infrastructure so that it became the keystone of the entire Arab edifice in North Africa. Ḷayrawān, its capital thanks to its mosque, became one of the most important centres of Islamic learning and culture.

It is to be presumed that in this period Ifrīkiya was entirely Muslim, its population gradually adopting the Arab language owing to the large number of Arabs who had settled there.

The conquest of the western Maghrib

Ḥassān ibn al-Nu'mān did not remain in office long enough to complete his work. In 704 he was replaced by Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr, who came to Ifrīkiya bursting with energy despite his age; he wanted to subdue the central and western Maghrib, and reckoned

that he could extract a fabulous booty from it. Unfortunately for him, the Maghrib held nothing comparable to the hoards of gold and precious stones that had been seized in Iran and Iraq when they were conquered. Here there was nothing but men, their families and their flocks.

The objective of his first campaign was the territory of some subgroups of the Hawwāra and Djarāwa who had not yet made their submission. He launched a fierce attack and took a great many prisoners. This hard blow struck fear into the hearts of *ḵabīlas* from one end of the Central Atlas to the other. As they began to flee towards the western Maghrib, Mūsā pursued them. After capturing a number of villages and compelling the submission of various *ḵabīlas* in the Rif, Mūsā occupied Tangiers (Tandja) and offered protection to Ceuta (Sabta) and its governor, Julian. From there, Mūsā sent out flying columns headed by his four sons and other officers to sweep the western Maghrib in all directions.

Most of the Berbers of western Maghrib surrendered and converted to Islam. Mūsā created three new provinces: the central Maghrib with Tlemcen (Tilimsān) as its capital, the far western Maghrib (al-Maghrib al-aḵṣā) with Tangiers (Tandja) as its capital, and al-Sūs al-aḵṣa. In order to ensure the obedience of the conquered *ḵabīlas*, he took large numbers of fighting men as hostages and incorporated them in his Muslim army. At Tangiers, Mūsā appointed his son Marwān governor and allotted to him 17,000 soldiers of the Maṣmūda; subsequently he replace Marwān with Ṭāriḵ ibn Ziyād.

Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr had thus completed the conquest of the whole Maghrib. It was a magnificent achievement, but he had employed cruel methods, for which the Muslims were to pay dearly in due course.

The conquest of the Iberian peninsula (al-Andalus)

No study of the Arab conquest of North Africa and of the transformation of the Berbers into a Muslim people can reasonably ignore the salient role played by the Berbers in the conquest of the Iberian peninsula, or their contribution to the history of Islamic Spain and hence to Muslim hegemony in the Mediterranean.

The first Muslim military leader to undertake (in 710) a reconnaissance operation in southern Iberia to explore the possibilities for conquest was the Berber Ṭarīf, son of Zar'a ibn Abī Mudrik. He successfully carried out the expedition, and a small port in southern Spain, Tarifa, is named after him. The Muslim general who first decided on the conquest of Spain was also a Berber, Ṭāriḵ ibn Ziyād ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Walghū. As we have seen, Mūsā had appointed Ṭāriḵ ibn Ziyād governor of the province of Tandja, or al-Maghrib al-Aḵṣā, 'the far western Maghrib'. He commanded an army of 17,000 men, mainly Ṣanhādja.

With this expeditionary force and some additional Arab troops, Ṭāriḵ crossed the straits and disembarked near a rocky promontory which from that day to this has borne his name: Djabal Ṭāriḵ ('Ṭāriḵ's mountain'), or, as we now pronounce it, Gibraltar. In August 711, he won his great victory over the Visigoth army, in which the last Visigoth king, Roderick, or Rodrigo (Rūdrīk in Arabic), was killed in the battle. Ṭāriḵ then pushed on with his cavalry to Toledo (Ṭulayṭula in Arabic); after a forced march of over 500 kilometres, he seized the Gothic capital, thus taking full advantage of his

initial success. Within a month, by September 711, Ṭāriq, the first of the great Berber generals of western Islam, had already put an end to Visigothic rule in the peninsula and ushered in the era of Islamic Spain.

Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr crossed to Spain and finished the work of conquest with an army of 18,000 men, mainly Arabs. Ṭāriq and his Berbers were given the task of conquering the north-west of Spain; within three months, in 712, they swept the entire territory north of the Ebro as far as the Pyrenees. Before the period of his command in Spain was over, Ṭāriq, with his Berber troops, conquered the whole of the region later to be called Old Castile, occupying Amaya, Astorga and finally Léon.

In the aftermath of these brilliant successes in Spain, Berbers by the thousands flooded into the Iberian peninsula. As soon as they arrived they took part in the conquest of the rest of the peninsula and in the Muslim campaign in the south of France. It is estimated that 80,000 Berbers fought in the battle of Poitiers alone. This battle, which put an end to the Muslims' successes in Gaul, took place in the autumn of 732. Thousands of Berbers stayed on in the south of France during the next forty years. Many others settled in Spain (al-Andalus, the Arabic name of Islamic Spain), marrying either Arab or Ibero-Roman wives and becoming Muslim Andalusians. There were Berber colonies scattered throughout the peninsula. Their offspring were known as *muwalladūn*, i.e. Andalusians with Arab or Berber fathers and Iberian mothers, and these made up 70% of the population of Islamic Spain. These Andalusians of Berber origin, who were found in all social classes, have left us an endless list of famous names: generals, ministers, theologians, inventors, poets and artists.

The Berbers after the Arab conquest

Once the conquest of North Africa by the Arabs was over (642–711), we find a completely new country whose people were undergoing a total transformation in their social, and even ethnic, structures, their way of life, their way of thought and even their conception of the world. From the Atlantic coast to Cyrenaica, the population now looked towards the Arab Muslim East; as they became progressively Islamized and Arabized, they felt increasingly that they belonged to that world. Some of the more important social groupings began even to boast of remote pre-Islamic Arab forebears.

In the course of the conquest, the Berbers adopted the Islamic faith *en masse*, but at first this acceptance barely constituted more than lip-service. They continued to adhere to Islam because its clear and simple doctrine attracted them. Throughout the period of the conquest, Arab immigrants settled in all parts of North Africa. Large Arab settlements were established in many areas in Cyrenaica and the province of Ifrikiya.

There were also small groups of Arabs, sometimes even single families or individuals, who settled among Berber groups where they were regarded as teachers; they acted as *imāms* or religious leaders. This spiritual leadership often developed into political leadership as well, the Arab *imām* becoming the political head of the *ḡabīla*. This development involved some Berberization of the Arab colonists in turn.

Very often these Arab colonists belonged to one or another of the dissident Islamic sects known as *Khāridjites* (*Khawāridjī*) that opposed the Umayyad regime and preached

egalitarian doctrines, which found ready acceptance among the Berbers.

The great conquest through which the Arabs had expanded beyond their peninsula had been carried out under the banner and in the name of the new Islamic religion. In this initial period, the terms 'Arab' and 'Muslim' meant the same thing. The Umayyad empire was effectively an Arab kingdom headed by the Kurayshite aristocracy of Mecca, who had once been the Prophet's adversaries and had converted only at the last minute. This aristocracy ruled the Islamic state primarily for their own advantage, disregarding the democratic principles characteristic of Islamic doctrine. The new non-Arab converts continued to be treated as second-class citizens and did not enjoy the same rights as Arabs, especially with respect to the taxes to which they were subjected. Aiming to preserve their privileges and their revenues, the Umayyad Caliphs – apart from the pious 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz (717–20) – were never willing to grant the newly converted their rights as members of the Islamic community (*umma*) or to regard them as equal to the Arabs.

As has often happened historically, ethnic and social tensions found expression in dissident religious movements. In the case of the Berbers, all the necessary conditions were present. The last Umayyad governors introduced a harsh policy, which soon provoked a hostile reaction: the Berbers were regarded as a vanquished people, to be governed by force, even though almost all of them had already converted to Islam, had fought for Islam, and therefore considered themselves an integral part of the Islamic empire, on an equal footing with Arabs. The Berbers complained that they had been poorly rewarded for their services (as was most visibly the case in Spain, where they had been given the less fertile regions as fiefs). So the Maghrib turned away from the Sunnite orthodoxy which represented official Umayyad policy and adopted Khāridjite doctrines instead. The Khāridjites succeeded in founding communities of their sect in all regions. These centres of dissidence were established as much by the Berbers themselves as by the Arabs. Both together attacked the Umayyad administration. The general uprising against the Umayyads which began in the western Maghrib in 741 was not a rising of Berbers against the Arabs to drive the latter out of the Maghrib altogether, but rather an Islamic revolt against the Umayyad administration.

The Maghrib under the Umayyads

After the battle of Poitiers (732), the centripetal force that had drawn a growing number of provinces into the orbit of Damascus was spent. Eight years later, in 740, the contrary process began – the centrifugal reaction which was to lead to the foundation of several independent states. Between 697 and 740, there had been eight successive Umayyad governors at Ḳayrawān, the regional capital from which all the western Muslim territories were administered, ranging from Lebda, east of Tripoli, to Narbonne, beyond the Pyrenees. Direct government by Damascus thus lasted only a little more than forty years. So short a period of time may seem of little consequence when compared with the duration of Roman, Vandal or Byzantine domination. The results, however, were considerably more significant and more durable. Why is this so? Most probably because the autochthonous population, while rejecting foreign domination, gave its genuine support to the values that had been introduced by the Arabs. As we shall see, the commitment to those values was all the more profound because they contributed in a decisive way to setting in motion and stimulating the forces behind the struggle for freedom.

To understand the difficult beginnings of the new Maghrib, with its independence rising out of conquest, a clear distinction must be made between the message of the Qoran and its historical interpretation. Interpretation almost always leads to misinterpretation. The ideal of fraternity, which was supposed to govern relations between Muslims without any distinction as to race, colour or place, was very poorly applied in practice. There was no racism based on doctrine or principle, and no actual segregation either. The Arabs were nevertheless inclined to consider the Berbers as little more than 'the scum of the earth'. It must be said, however, so as not to convey the wrong impression, that some of the most generous Arabs attempted to ennoble them by devising for them some distant Arab, especially Yemenī, ancestry. The aim was to use genealogical fiction in order to win over the Berbers, assimilate them and make brothers of them. This reflected the hesitations and the ambiguity which the Arabs showed towards the Berbers.

This hesitant approach is to be found in politics. Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān integrated the Berbers into his army and involved them in the *ḡay'* or sharing of land. His

successor, Mūsā b. ibn Nuṣayr (698–714), while surrounding himself with numerous and faithful Berber clients including Tāriq, the celebrated conqueror of Spain, waged his pacification campaigns in a vigorous manner. Caliph Sulaymān (715–17) replaced him by Muḥammad b. Yazīd, to whom he gave instructions on fiscal equity. This trend was further accentuated by the very pious figure of ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (717–20), whose governor, a *mawlā* and also an ascetic, poured all his zeal into spreading Islam and giving it the best possible image. When he died, a new governor, Yazīd b. Abī Muslim, in order to maintain the volume of taxes, which had been dwindling as a result of the numerous conversions to Islam, decreed, contrary to the letter and spirit of the Qoran, that those who were newly converted to Islam should continue to pay the *ḍjizya* or poll-tax and went so far as to humiliate his Berber guards by having their hands branded. The guards subsequently assassinated him (720–1).

From then on, the situation grew steadily worse. In a memorandum left for the Caliph Hishām (724–43) by a delegation led by Maysara, who was later to launch the revolt which marked the beginning of the independence of the Maghrib, the main Berber grievances were summarized as follows: exclusion of Muslim Berber warriors from sharing the booty with the Arabs; their employment as the vanguard in the heaviest battles whilst Arab troops were held back; the seizing and killing of their flocks and herds as well as the abduction of Berber girls and women; and, in general, unjust and inequitable treatment at the hands of the Arabs and their commanders.

Khāridjism, a revolutionary doctrine

Maysara, who was known as the Despised One (*al-hakīr*), was a former Berber water-carrier who had become converted to Ṣufrite Khāridjism. Under the Umayyads, Khāridjism had been the strongest revolutionary force. It had arisen in the *fitna*, or the major crisis that had shaken the Muslim community after the assassination of ‘Uthmān (656), and had been forged first of all into a political theology. This theology had as a common basis, to be found in all forms of Khāridjism, the principle of an elected Imām, the highest leader of the community, without distinction as to race, colour or country, power thereby being invested in the best man, ‘even if he were an Ethiopian slave with a slit nose’.

There were four movements in Khāridjism that can be listed in descending order of revolutionary extremism: the Azāriqa, the Nadjadāt, the Ṣufrites and the Ibādites. The most violent of these, the Azāriqa, was exterminated in the Orient towards 700, whereas the Nadjadāt had practically disappeared from the political scene a few years earlier, around 693, before the Maghrib was completely conquered, so that only the Ṣufrites and the Ibādites remained. It can be said with some degree of certitude that their protagonists started to move westwards around 714.

What they brought to the Maghrib was a revolutionary strategy that had been conceived and put into practice in the Orient, together with a doctrine adapted to that strategy. The strategy combined *ku‘ūd*, clandestine subversive action under the cover of *taḳiyya* or tactical dissimulation, with *khurūdj*, open insurrection launched at the appropriate time. The doctrine stressed absolute equality among all Muslims and the illegal nature of the ruling authority of the Umayyads, who had come to power

through violence. It condemned the unjust nature of this authority, which had repeatedly violated the letter and the spirit of the Qoran, particularly in fiscal matters. All the main ideological themes were supported by *ḥadīths* or sayings of the Prophet. Revolt against Umayyad tyranny was preached not merely as a right but also as an imperative religious duty.

Khāridjism exercised an appeal on account of its austere and rigorous nature. It is quite obvious that there was perfect complementarity between the doctrine, on the one hand, and the psychological, socio-economic and physical environment, on the other. As Dozy once wrote, in a few lines that have retained all their vigour despite the passing of some hundred years, in the Maghrib, 'Muslim Calvinism had at long last found its Scotland.' However, apart from this almost biological complementarity, the root of the success of *Khāridjism* is to be found in the fact that the Berbers were caught in the midst of a storm. They felt frustrated, humiliated and oppressed and their grievances had not aroused any interest in Damascus.

Maysara thus led the revolt under the banner of *Ṣufrism* (740) and was granted the title of Caliph. Nevertheless, the reign of the first Berber Caliph was to be very short. Having drawn back to Tangier in the face of the enemy, he was relieved of his command and executed. It was his successor, *Khālid b. Ḥumayd al-Zanātī*, who won the resounding victory of the Battle of the Nobles (741), which was a humiliating slaughter of the flower of the Arab aristocracy. Towards the end of the same year, this victory was followed by another, on the banks of the *Sebū*.

But, as triumph came nearer, the seeds of discord were sown among the ranks of the victors. The following year, at the walls of the besieged city of *Ḳayrawān*, there were two rival armies that were most unexpectedly defeated, one after the other, by an Arab army led by *Hanzāla b. Ṣafwān* (743).

The Ṣufrite kingdoms

After the turmoil the map of the Maghrib was completely changed. *Ḳayrawān*, admittedly, had stood firm, but all the western and central Maghrib now lay beyond the reach of the authority of the Orient.

The *Khāridjite* democratic spirit, with its excessive concern for self-rule, allied to ethnic sectarianism, had led to a multitude of states rising from the ruins of centralized Arab authority. The smaller of these states, with their fluctuating boundaries and uncertain lifespan, are scarcely known to us. Only the largest kingdoms, which played a leading part in events, have left their mark on history.

The first of these to have been set up was *Tāmasnā*, on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, between *Salé* and *Azemmour*, and was better known under the name of the kingdom of the *Barghawāta*. It was founded by *Ṭarīf*, who had taken part in the *Ṣufrite* attack on *Ḳayrawān*. Berber nationalism was here carried to the extreme, when the fourth king of the *Banū Ṭarīf* dynasty, *Yūnus b. Ilyās* (842-84), decided to endow his people with a national religion based on Islam so as to emancipate them more fully. He declared his grandfather, *Ṣāliḥ b. Ṭarīf*, to have been a prophet and attributed to him a Qoran in the Berber language and a whole range of prescribed rites and dietary restrictions. This, in short, amounted to a kind of cultural emancipation aimed at putting the

finishing touches to the political emancipation that had already been achieved. This process, *mutatis mutandis*, is not unlike certain contemporary phenomena of decolonization. The Banū Ṭarīf succeeded in preserving their independence and their originality for centuries; even their Sunnite Muslim enemies could not refrain from praising their courage and their moral conduct.

While the kingdom of Tāmasnā was being formed, the kingdom of Tlemcen (742–89) was founded in the central Maghrib by Abū Qurra, who had also taken part in the abortive assault on Ḳayrawān. His kingdom did not, however, outlive him for long, since in 789 Tlemcen fell under the rule of the Idrīsids without the slightest resistance.

The third Ṣufrite kingdom, that of the Banū Wasūl, better known as the Banū Midrār, was founded at Sidjilmāsa (757–976) by the Miknāsa Berbers. The kingdom enjoyed a peaceful existence up until 909 when the Fāṭimids came to power. The imām al-Yasā' b. Midrār was executed and replaced by a Fāṭimid governor, who did not manage to stay in power for more than two months. The Banū Wasūl regained power over the town and were able to govern it despite all obstacles, discarding Ṣufrism for Ibādism and finally for Sunnism, until they were ousted, once and for all, by the Zanātian Banū Khazrūn, backed by the Umayyads of Spain. Sidjilmāsa was, first and foremost, a major Saharan trading centre, a resting place on the gold route and a focal point for trade between the countries to the south of the Sahara, the Maghrib and the Orient.

The Ibādite kingdoms

As described above, insurrection came first from the west; it was Ṣufrite in ideology and led by the Zanāta Berbers. The Ibādites, who were more moderate and, by necessity, more cautious, began by simply adopting a 'wait and see' attitude. They had first organized themselves, in accordance with their theology, which admitted the *ku'ūd* and the *kitmān*, in preparation for when the right moment came.

This happened in 745. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥabīb, a quasi-independent governor of Ḳayrawān, made the mistake of having the Ibādite leader of the province of Tripoli, 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd al-Tudjībī, executed. The execution was the signal for open insurrection. Two Ibādite leaders, both Arabs, scored victory after victory and finally took over the whole of the province of Tripoli. Like their Ṣufrite brethren, they too fell under the curse of dissension and were subsequently discovered dead, each run through with the sword of the other. A Berber, Ismā'il b. Ziyād al-Nafuṣī, became leader and besieged Gabès but 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥabīb managed to defeat him in 748–9 and to regain Tripoli, where he massacred the Ibādites on a large scale so as to rid the province of heresy.

Ibādism, however, survived and merely reverted to clandestinity or *ku'ūd*, with the appropriate structures of *kitmān*, or secrecy, and *taḳiyya*, or tactical dissimulation, which ensured that it could survive until the time came for a new resurgence. Ibādism was to come violently to the fore again on two occasions. After the assassination of 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥabīb, it seized power in Tripoli in 754. Abū al-Ḳhaṭṭāb then went on towards Ḳayrawān, which had meanwhile been occupied and cruelly treated

by the Šufrite Warfadjūma from southern Tunisia. He entered the city in 758 and appointed as governor 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Rustum, the future founder of Tiāret. In 761 Ibn al-Ash'ath came to raise yet again the black standard of the Abbasids at Ḳayrawān, but ten years later the insurrection broke out once more with exceptional violence. Abū Ḥātim, the Ibādīte, who had come from Tripoli, put a stranglehold on the capital of Ifrīkiya and reduced the inhabitants to eating their cats and dogs. At the beginning of 772, the starving city fell once more into the hands of the Ibādītes, but for only a few months. In May 772 Yazīd b. Ḥātim al-Muhallabī put an end, once and for all, to the attempts of the Ibādītes to seize power in the eastern Maghrib.

Tiāret was the only Ibādīte state to have been successfully established for some length of time (761–910). It was founded by the Persian, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Rustum, who had managed to escape from Ḳayrawān when it was besieged by Ibn al-Ash'ath. Around 778, he was raised to the status of Imām and his influence soon made itself felt in the Orient, from where the Ibādīte congregation sent him substantial funds. The dynasty he founded, despite schisms, was never really challenged. The Rustumid state stretched from the central Maghrib as far as the Djabel Nefusa but with its ill-defined boundaries it never possessed any complex structure and, beyond the limits of the city of Tiāret itself, the Imām's authority was much more of a spiritual than of a temporal nature. Despite conflicting doctrines, the Rustumids established strong ties of friendship with the Umayyads of Spain.

The decline of Khāridjism and the founding of the Idrīsīd kingdom

Khāridjism did not enter the Maghrib alone. At virtually the same time, the Mu'tazilites also won over a number of followers, and the Ibādītes were obliged to call upon their wisest scholars to compete against them in public contests of eloquence, which created a sensation and were long remembered. A Mu'tazilite principedom, governed by a Berber, Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Mu'tazilī, had even been successfully established at Ayzaradj to the west of Tiāret.

From the middle of the eighth century Shī'ite Islam began to constitute a serious rival to Khāridjism, which suffered serious setbacks. After the abortive rebellion led by Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya at Mecca in 762 and the bloody repression that ensued, many Shī'ites were forced to seek refuge elsewhere. Some settled in the Maghrib, where they engaged in religious and political proselytism, greatly assisted by the aura of their descent from the Prophet himself. Abū Sufyān and al-Hulwānī came to settle in the western confines of Ifrīkiya in 762, where they began to lay the first foundation for the eventual advent of the Fāṭimids. Thus Khāridjism, with its democratic spirit, was beginning to give way to a diametrically opposed doctrine, theocratic Shī'ism.

This doctrinal change was at the root of the success of the Idrīsīds. Idrīs I, one of the brothers of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, eventually came to Wulīlī (Volubilis), an old centre of Christian civilization, where he was welcomed in August 788 by the leader of the Awrāba Berbers, the Mu'tazilite 'Abd al-Ḥāmid. Six months later, he took the oath of investiture, the *bay'a*. He immediately embarked on a vast campaign of expansion and Islamization. Tlemcen soon opened its gates to him. His actions caused such

concern to the Abbasid Caliph that the latter had him assassinated (795). Nothing was solved by the assassination. Idrīs I left behind him his Berber concubine, Kanza, who was pregnant. The child was named after his father and government was exercised for him until he could take the oath of investiture. Baghdad, however, remained on its guard. A Shī'ite, even if he was partly of Berber stock, could constitute a threat, even in a remote area on the fringe of the civilized world. The Caliphate therefore attempted, by means of intrigue and bribery, to crush any subversion in its embryonic stage. The investiture of Idrīs II took place as early as 803, but it is not known under which title, although it was possibly that of Imām, in accordance with Zaydite doctrine. This, however, did not put an end to conspiracies. In 808 Idrīs II ordered the execution of Iṣḥāk b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd – the leader of the Awrāba, who had been at the root of his father's success – for having had dealings with the Aghlabid enemy. Was it perhaps to escape from the domination of his Berber protectors that the young king established his quarters the following year on the left bank of the Wādī Fās and surrounded himself with Arabs? With time, however, hostilities between Aghlabids and Idrīsids gradually died away as it became clear that the Idrīsids did not constitute a danger for their neighbours, and still less for the Caliphate.

Their original Shī'ite beliefs were soon to be discarded for Sunnism. Thus, to all intents and purposes, the Maghrib came to be divided into three spheres of influence: the Aghlabids in the east, the Khāridjtes in the central region and the Idrīsids in the west.

Idrīs II pursued the policies introduced by his father, which consisted of Islamization and Arabization and of extending the borders of the kingdom. Idrīs II ensured that his authority was recognized by the Maṣmūda of the High Atlas, retained Tlemcen within his orbit and seized Nefis in the south. However, he failed in the west, where he met with resistance from the Barghawāta, who were occupying the Tāmasnā plateau along the Atlantic coast.

When he died in September 828, he was the ruler of a large and prosperous kingdom, which he divided between seven of his ten sons. This division of the kingdom turned out to be quite disastrous. Muḥammad (828–36), the eldest son of Idrīs II, was granted Fez and thereby received the right of overlordship. His brothers, comfortably endowed, were supposed to be his vassals and remain under his authority. In actual fact, the arrangement worked badly. The achievements of Idrīs I and Idrīs II in the form of political unification and expansion were followed by the gradual disintegration of the kingdom. Subsequently, with the death of Yaḥyā II (859), the senior branch of the family lost its regal authority, which fell into the hands of the younger branch of the Banū 'Umar. From then on, the history of the dynasty was little more than a monotonous series of internal quarrels, disturbances and bloody fights, which terminated only when it came to an end in 985. Having vanished from Morocco, it reappeared in 1016 in Cordoba in the person of a short-lived Caliph, 'Alī b. Ḥammūd, a descendant of the Banū 'Umar.

The unflattering and yet inevitable end of the Idrīsīd dynasty should not conceal the very important part it played in the destiny of Morocco. The Idrīsids were responsible for the emergence of a Moroccan national consciousness that can be traced right through to the present day and gave the country its first capital, Fez. In the western Maghrib,

Fez was to play the part that had been conferred on *Ḳayrawān* in *Ifriḳiya* and on Cordoba in Spain. Thanks to Lévi-Provençal, we know that Fez was founded first of all by *Idrīs I*, who in 789 built the city on the right bank of the *Wādī Fās*, populated by Berbers, and subsequently by *Idrīs II*, who, in 809, opposite the first city, erected a new and better planned one on the left bank. As it benefited from an extremely favourable position on the major east-west axis along the *Taza* valley and possessed ample supplies of water, wood, stone for building and clay for pottery, Fez developed rapidly and was the pride of the *Idrīsids*. As the spiritual centre of the new state, it was, and has remained ever since, an intellectual centre of the first order.

At the outset, the kingdom of the *Idrīsids*, established as it was in a Berber environment, was no more Arab than the kingdom of the *Rustumids* had been Persian. Nevertheless, by accepting refugees from *Ḳayrawān* and Cordoba, Fez rapidly became the centre of Arabization. The still famous mosque and university of *al-Ḳarawīyyīn* was founded by a woman from *Ḳayrawān* in 859. This was to play a decisive role in the religious and cultural history of Morocco. Thus Fez became a capital that was Arab, both politically and intellectually, within a Berber environment. Although the *Idrīsids* were originally *Zaydite Shī'ites*, they do not appear to have made any particular effort to impose their own doctrine. They encouraged the spread of the teachings of *Mālik*, the great scholar at Medina, perhaps because he had never made any mystery about his sympathy for the 'Alids, especially during the revolt led by *al-Nafs al-Zakiyya*, the brother of *Idrīs I*. Accordingly *Mālikism* became the dominant school in Morocco during the reign of the *Idrīsids*.

The success of the *Idrīsids* had a contagious effect as other descendants of 'Alī came to win away the central Maghrib from *Khāridjism* with some success. *Al-Ya'qūbī*, who toured the region between 876 and 889, listed no fewer than nine 'Alid emirates.

The first attempt at independence in Ifriḳiya

The local Arabs in *Ifriḳiya*, chiefly the troops, began to suffer, at the hands of their fellow Arabs from the Orient, who had been dispatched to their aid after the Battle of the Nobles (740), the disdain usually reserved for the Berbers. On some occasions, open fighting between these two groups was narrowly avoided, but the animosity steadily grew. This illustrates the growth of a genuine local national consciousness in the minds of the Arabs of the Maghrib, particularly among those of the second or third generation, who, having been born in the country, had never seen the Orient. It is this particular phenomenon that will provide a coherent basis for a whole series of events that would otherwise remain unintelligible.

It is thus easier to understand how *Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥabīb* succeeded in expelling from *Ḳayrawān* *Hanzala b. Safwān* (covered in glory from his victory over the Berbers, but nevertheless a 'foreigner') and in founding the first independent state in the eastern Maghrib (744-54). With independence, the *Ifriḳiyan* army recovered from its recent humiliation and defeat and regained its former mettle. In 752-3 it successfully attacked Sicily, Sardinia and Tlemcen.

'*Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥabīb* was at the head of a state with an Arab leadership and living under a Sunnite doctrine. Therefore he was anxious for a *modus vivendi* with the

10.1 A general view of Fez with, in the foreground, the outer city wall, which was rebuilt several times by successive dynasties. (M. el-Fasi)



10.2 The minaret of the Karāwiyyīn mosque in Fez. (Ministère de la Culture du Maroc, Rabat)



Caliphate, i.e. with Damascus first, whose end was near, and then with Baghdad. He took without demur the oath of allegiance to the Abbasid Caliph. This meant that he officially recognized the new regime, hoping in return for *de jure* recognition which would confirm and strengthen the independence which existed in fact. The first Abbasid Caliph al-Šaffāḥ (750–4) gave the impression of having implicitly accepted such a development in relations between Baghdad and Ḳayrawān, but his successor al-Manšūr (754–75) clearly expressed his desire to return to the situation as it was

before, especially with regard to fiscal regulations and the traditional supply of slaves. 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Ḥabīb declined, pointing out that Ifrīkiya had become entirely Muslim and that it was no longer possible to make people slaves or to levy heavy taxes; moreover, he refused to send any money to Baghdad. Shortly afterwards he was assassinated and thus the first attempt to achieve independence for Ifrīkiya was brought to an end.

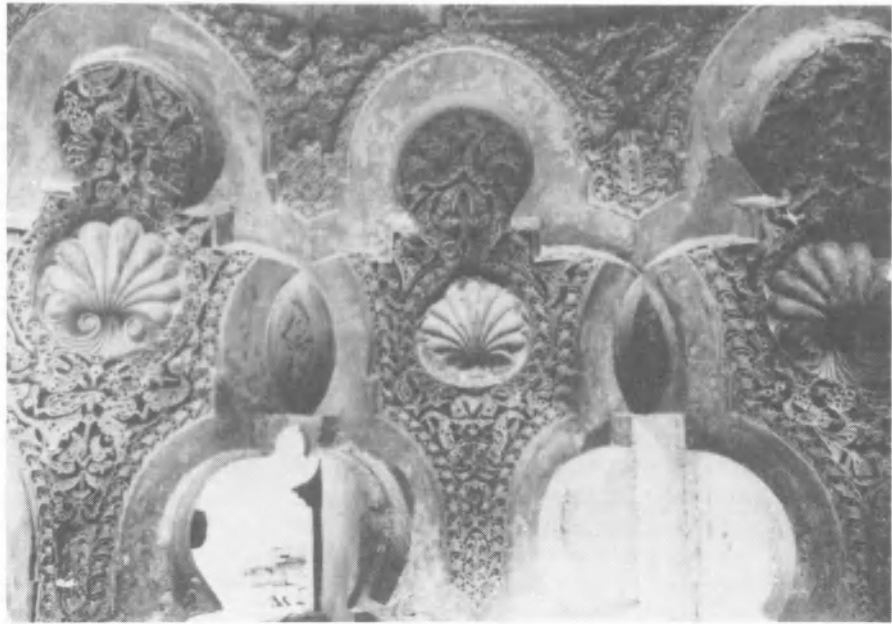
The Aghlabids

Al-Manṣūr succeeded in bringing back Ifrīkiya into the fold for another forty years or so (761–800). The bitterness of the struggle between the rival factions of the *djund* (Arab army) in their bid to seize power by force reached such intensity that Ifrīkiya became completely ungovernable. The region was now just a source of unending concern to the Caliphate, and weighed heavily on the treasury. Besides, Baghdad was increasingly in a position in which it could not afford to intervene militarily. Hārūn al-Rashīd decided therefore to grant Ifrīkiya the independence that it would undoubtedly have taken by force. His choice fell on a valid representative, Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab, who became founder of the Aghlabid kingdom (800–909).

Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab was a former vice-governor of the Mzāb and had many times given proof of his allegiance to the Abbasids, by always playing the part of a champion of legality. He accepted the nomination to governorship on condition that he could not be unseated and that the title would be hereditary. He offered in exchange to give up the subsidy of 100,000 dinars made over to Ifrīkiya from the *kharādj* of Egypt and to contribute, for his part, to the treasury of Baghdad an annual due of 40,000 dinars. Al-Rashīd accepted the proposal and thus the independence of Ifrīkiya was achieved through negotiations, without any schism or break with Baghdad.

The first three rulers of the new dynasty devoted their efforts to consolidating their regime. They inaugurated a period of peace and maturity during which Ifrīkiya enjoyed legendary prosperity. Abū Ibrāhīm Aḥmad (856–63) left behind him the memory of an ideal prince, entirely devoted to the interests of his subjects. He had many *ribāṭs* built for the defence of the coast and he equipped Kayrawān with cisterns which arouse admiration even today. The golden age, followed soon after by decline, occurred under the reign of Ibrāhīm II (875–902), which had begun very auspiciously. His subjects enjoyed a system of equitable justice and wise government. However, the king unfortunately suffered from melancholia and his mind gradually became unhinged. He became increasingly exacting and committed more and more political errors, thereby providing Shī'ite proselytism with a most welcome opportunity.

Shī'ite propaganda, with Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Dā'ī as spokesman, reaching among the Kutāma Berbers of Kabyliya, proclaimed the advent of the Mahdī, or Saviour, who would establish a paradise of justice on earth. Proselytism of this kind met with success and the Aghlabid regime, possessing vast material resources but deprived of popular support, was accordingly overwhelmed by the hordes sweeping down from the impoverished mountain areas and taking possession of the fertile valleys. The decisive blow fell in the region of El-Kēf, at al-Urbus (18 March 909). Ziyādat Allāh III, carrying off the riches hoarded by his ancestors, fled at night from the city of Raḡḡāda,



10.3 *The Kubba Barādiyyīn in Marrakesh: decorative detail beneath the dome. (J. Devisse)*



10.4 *Inner courtyard of the ribāt of Sūs, showing the two-storey structure: the small dome crowns the monumental entrance. (Institut national d'archéologie et d'art, Tunis)*

which had been founded by his grandfather. On the following day, the city was looted and plundered.

The independence movement was not limited to the Maghrib alone. Spain, for instance, underwent very similar developments but was hardly influenced by Khāridjism. Here, the struggle took place primarily between the two major Arab ethnic groups, who were traditional enemies, the Ḳays and the Kalb. In the end, power was seized by the Umayyad prince 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Mu'āwiya, whose mother, Rāh,

was a Berber captive from the Nafza *kaḥīla*. He escaped to the Maghrib, from where, after a veritable odyssey, he was able to re-enter Spain and found an independent emirate. In 929, the eighth sovereign of the dynasty, 'Abd al-Rahmān III, transformed the emirate into a Caliphate, thereby following the example set by the Fāṭimids. This was the golden age of Muslim Spain.

The Maghrib of the Middle Ages, with its extension into the Iberian peninsula, had interests which lay in two directions – northwards, to the Christian world, a land of trade and *djihād*, and southwards, to Africa, south of the Sahara, the source of gold.

The tide of expansion beyond the Pyrenees was halted once and for all in 732. The emirs of Cordoba were subsequently forced into a defensive *djihād* aimed at containing Christian pressure on their northern border. The final loss of Barcelona as early as 801 illustrates the very modest success of the *djihād*, which had started with the new thrust from the Maghrib towards Europe from Ḳayrawān in the third and fourth centuries. Ziyādāt Allāh I (817–38) seized the opportunity offered to him by Euphemius, the patrician of Sicily, for intervening in the island. The attack was led by the *kaḍī* Asad b. al-Furāt. The conquest, in which Ḳayrawān was opposed by Byzantium, soon became a difficult and laborious task. Begun in 827, it did not end until some fifty years later, with the capture of Syracuse (878). The Aghlabids also occupied Calabria, from where they harassed several coastal towns. The foray most sorely felt by all Christendom was that against Rome (846), during which not even the holy places were spared, but on the journey home the Aghlabid army perished in a storm. The alarm that gripped all of southern Italy was increased when Ibrāhīm II landed on Italian soil in 902, fired by the foolish design of reaching Mecca via Rome and Byzantium. The venture came to a close some months later when the emir, suffering from dysentery, expired beneath the walls of Cosenza (23 October 902). It should be noted that these events enabled a small Muslim emirate, founded by mercenaries who were initially in the pay of the Italian princes, to hold its ground in Bari from 847 until 871.

These violent clashes should not conceal from us the existence of peaceful relations which were maintained even during the hostilities. Fifty years of conflict, marked by some twenty naval expeditions launched between 703 and 752, mainly against Sicily and Sardinia, were followed by fifty years of total peace in the western Mediterranean (725–807), during which truces were concluded and ambassadors exchanged. The best known of these missions was the one which set off from Baghdad via Ḳayrawān to Carolingian Gaul in the spring of 801. Contrary to what H. Pirenne thought, there was no break between the empire of Muḥammad and that of Charlemagne. Trade was maintained and even included materials of strategic value, such as copper, iron or weapons, which Ifrīkiya supplied to Sicily. At the height of the war, Naples, Amalfi, Gaeta, Venice and Genoa maintained their trade with the Maghrib and did not hesitate to conclude alliances with it.

Relations with Africa south of the Sahara were free from violence during the period under consideration. Africa, admittedly, supplied slaves, but this was not, within the context of the period, necessarily a violent activity, nor for that matter a specifically African concern. Naples, for instance, sold white slaves of *ṣaḳāliba* to the Maghrib, and the part played by Verdun in the trading of eunuchs is well known. Whether in Ḳayrawān or in Cordoba, the Africans purchased in the regions south of the Sahara

served primarily in the army. They thereby contributed very efficiently to Ifrīqīyan expansion in Sicily and southern Italy, and within they consolidated the authority of the Aghlabid and Umayyad emirs.

Within this framework of multiple movements of people and goods, wealthy merchants were also on occasion ambassadors or influential political figures. This is precisely what happened to ‘Muḥammad b. ‘Arafa, who was sent to bear a precious gift to the King of the Sudan by Aflaḥ b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’ (823–71), Imām of Tiāret. The embassy with which he was entrusted was the earliest one that we know, from diplomatic records, to have taken place between the Maghrib and sub-Saharan Africa.

Society and culture

The Maghrib of the Middle Ages was never as populous as it was in the ninth century. The prevailing trend at the time, quite unlike that of later periods, was towards the sedentarization of the nomads who populated the central Maghrib at the areas bordering on the Sahara, and towards urbanization. The four major political and cultural capitals of the region – Ḳayrawān, Tiāret, Sidjilmāsa and Fez – were the fruit of an Arab Muslim culture. Ḳayrawān, in the ninth century certainly had several hundred thousand inhabitants and Sidjilmāsa was equally populous and prosperous. The concentration of the population in towns was not the same throughout this part of the world. The eastern Maghrib, Sicily and Spain, for instance, were the most urbanized areas.

The distinguishing feature of the society was its very varied composition. The population of the Maghrib had as its basis the Berbers, who were themselves very diverse. Spain was populated mainly with Iberians and Goths. Until the mid-eleventh century the Arabs were few in number. In Ifrīqīya, they were several tens of thousands, possibly a hundred or a hundred-and-fifty thousand at the most. The Arabs were even less numerous in Spain and there were practically none in the Maghrib, where traces of their presence can only be found in Tiāret, Sidjilmāsa and Fez. The Berbers had for their part spread into the Iberian peninsula, where they outnumbered the Arabs. In addition to these, there were two other ethnic components, whose numbers and specific role are even harder to evaluate. On the one hand, there were the Europeans – peoples of Latin, Germanic or Slavonic origin – considered globally to be *ṣakāliba*; on the other hand, there were the blacks, who were inextricably associated with the life of wealthy or comfortably off families or who served in the personal guard of the emirs, as has already been stated.

Medieval society in the western territories of Islam was composed of three categories of men: slaves, former slaves, generally called *mawālī*, and freemen by birth.

The slaves were very numerous in major urban areas, but virtually unknown in areas with a predominantly nomadic population and strong tribal structures. It is estimated that they formed one-fifth of the population of the major cities of Ifrīqīya and Spain. As in other social strata, there were those that were fortunate and those that were less so. The slaves were to be found in the harems – as white or black favourites and eunuchs – as in every sector of economic life and at all levels. The status of the slave was unenviable, despite the safeguards provided by Muslim law, and notwithstanding the exceptional success of certain slaves. Their economic role was, however, immense

as they were the machine tools of the times. In the eastern part of the Maghrib and in Spain, a very considerable proportion of domestic, craft and rural workers were slaves or semi-slaves, especially on the large estates, which sometimes encompassed several villages.

However, the status of the slave never lasted indefinitely. It is a well-known fact that the Qoran lays considerable emphasis on the merits of enfranchisement. Accordingly, the ranks of slaves, through the combined effect of enfranchisement and the purchase of liberty, were constantly thinned out as slaves aspired to move up into another and equally numerous social category, that of the *mawālī*. Social mobility, which really did exist, worked in favour of freedom.

The *mawālī*, although legally free through enfranchisement, continued to live in their former master's entourage, thereby constituting his clientele. A motley collection of humble folk also belonged to the *mawālī*. Non-Arabs, they deliberately put themselves under the protection of an influential person, an Arab, and adopted his *nisba* or ethnic ascendance. Both patrons and clients found advantage in the organic ties of the *walā*. The client benefited from his master's protection, while the patron acquired prestige and power according to the size of his clientele.

The freemen in general were divided into two classes: the aristocratic minority, influential and usually wealthy, the *khāssa*; and the majority of plebeians, the *ʿamma*. The *khāssa* was the ruling class. It consisted of the élite by birth or by military tradition, the intellectual élite, and, in general, all persons of any wealth. The affluence of some members of the *khāssa* occasionally reached fabulous proportions. By contrast, the *ʿamma* was composed of a variety of peasants, small farmers, craftsmen, shopkeepers and a mass of labourers who hired out their services in the fields and in the towns. Hope of gaining admittance to the *khāssa* was not denied to the members of the *ʿamma*, since no rigid legal structure acted as an obstacle to this.

Alongside the ethnic and social barriers between men, there were others of a religious nature. At the time of the conquest of the Maghrib, traditional religion, Judaism and Christianity existed side by side. Islam attracted a following from all social classes and by the ninth century had become the religion of the majority. While virtually nothing remained of traditional religion, Judaism and Christianity retained a considerable following among the native populations. These followers were the traditional *dhimmīs*, or protégés of Islam, who, in addition to religious freedom, enjoyed a separate fiscal and legal status. In Spain, they had a *comes* as their leader, sometimes referred to also as *defensor* or *protector*. Many sources point to the fact that *dhimmīs* and Muslims led the same kind of life and lived on good terms. The degree of harmony was such that in some instances, certain Christians, particularly in the lower classes, gave genuine veneration to the celebrated Muslim ascetics in their community. *Djāriyas*, or slave-wives to Muslims, who had retained their Christian or Jewish convictions, were, in fact, quite common. The children born of such mixed marriages usually took up their father's religion.

Similarly, colour prejudice was quite unknown in the western territories of Islam during the Middle Ages. The Arabs undoubtedly believed themselves to be superior, as we have already stressed, but they mingled willingly with other races. Black *djāriyas* were appreciated no less than others and mulattos, free from any complex whatsoever,

moved freely at any level in the social hierarchy. As interreligious and interracial marriages became more frequent, family lineage, despite the leading role conferred on the father by Arab tradition, became more obscure. In short, Hispano-Maghribian society, amazingly tolerant as it was during the medieval period and particularly composite and heterogeneous at its two extremes, was a network of cells which were both very specific and also intimately interrelated through a system of multiple and intricate ties.

Several languages were spoken in the western territories of Islam during the period under consideration. First and foremost were the Berber dialects, different from each other and widespread throughout the Maghrib, especially in the rural and mountainous areas where Arabic could not easily penetrate. These dialects, however, never followed the armies to the northern coast of the Mediterranean. Indeed, no trace whatsoever of Berber dialects has been found in Spain and Sicily, where the local tongues had to compete exclusively with Arabic. In Spain, a Hispano-Romance language did develop and came to be widely used both in the countryside and in the cities. An Ifrikiyan-Romance language must have been used among Christian city-dwellers. All these were essentially oral languages. The only cultural or written language was Arabic, which was used by both the Muslims and the *dhimmīs*.

There were a considerable number of cultural centres. Every provincial capital and all the major towns had their poets, their *adībs* (men of letters) and their theologians or *faqīhs*. The most outstanding centres were Qayrawān, Cordoba and Fez. In these centres literature drew most of its inspiration from the Orient. Throughout the breadth of Islam, it was the same poets and the same *adībs* that awakened admiration, and the same literary paths that were pursued. The *rihla* or journey, combining the virtues of study with those of a pilgrimage, maintained close and uninterrupted communication between the capitals of the West and those of the Orient. People and ideas moved from one country to another at a speed that is all the more surprising as communications were slow, arduous and even dangerous. In Ifrikiya, no less than in other parts of the Muslim world, there was among the educated classes a taste for verse and everyone was something of a poet. There were even some princes who were quite proficient at writing verse, such as Muḥammad b. Ziyādat Allāh II (d. 896), who compiled two anthologies, both of which have unfortunately been lost. The capital of the Aghlabids also had its philologists, who were sufficiently eminent to have been classified separately by al-Zubaydī in his *Ṭabaqāt al-Nahwiyyīn*. It would seem, however, that philosophy, which was already beginning to achieve some recognition in the Orient with al-Kindī (d. 870), was not, and never was to be, accepted in Ifrikiya. The city that Sīdī 'Uḡba dedicated to the defence of Islam could not come to terms with freedom of thought that was as suspicious as this. This discipline was, as yet, still only in its infancy, even in Spain, where it was subsequently explored by masters of world renown, especially Ibn Massarra (d. 931).

Throughout the Muslim world of the Middle Ages, people not only enjoyed occasional indulgence in verse writing and philosophical discussion, but also enjoyed drinking, singing and dancing, especially at the courts. The *djāriyas*, trained in the singing and dancing schools of Medina and Baghdad, were much sought after and their price sometimes involved stupendous sums. Famous composers were similarly sought after. One of these was Ziriyāb (789-852), a black *mawlā* of the Abbasids. After spending



10.5 *Door and blind arches of the west façade of the mosque at Cordoba. (Photo: copyright Werner Forman Archives, London)*

some time in Ḳayrawān, he went to Cordoba at the invitation of al-Haḳam I (796–822). Ziryāb brought profound changes to the customs of the court and the ruling class in society and became the *arbiter elegantiae* for it. His music, aided by certain instrumental improvements of his own invention, soon replaced all the old melodies and has lived on through the centuries until today. The *mālūf*, which is still in fashion in the Maghrib today, and Spanish flamenco are remotely descended from the revolution brought about in music by Ziryāb.

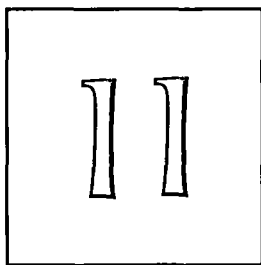
At this time, science had barely gone beyond the embryo stage in Spain. In Ḳayrawān, however, the school of medicine, with such masters as Ishāḳ b. 'Imrān and Ziyād b. Kalfūn (d. 920–1), already enjoyed a certain renown. The ninth century should be remembered especially for two of the finest monuments of Islam, the mosque of Ḳayrawān, which was built chiefly by the Aghlabids, and the mosque of Cordoba which, although founded by 'Abd al-Raḥmān I in 785, did not reach completion until two centuries later under the rule of the mighty 'Master of the Palace', Ibn Abī 'Amir (988). It should also be noted that the celebrated university and mosque of al-Ḳarawiyyīn, in Fez, was founded in 859 by a woman from Ḳayrawān.

Throughout the Middle Ages, cultural matters remained essentially in the hands of ecclesiastics, that is to say, the *ḡaḳīhs* in the Muslim world. In the ninth century, no school of thought had yet gained the upper hand and hence there was relative freedom of thought and the violence of passionately held beliefs. Strangely enough, the capital city where freedom of thought was most inhibited was Cordoba. There was greater tolerance at Tiāret, though it was dominated by the Ibādites, reputed for their intransigence. As for Ḳayrawān, it is an accepted fact that from the mid-ninth century onwards, the Great Mosque was open to the various circles of Ibādites, Ṣufrites and Mu'tazilites, who dared to plead and openly teach their 'unorthodox' or 'heretical' opinions before the very eyes and ears of the Sunnites. The debates were lively, vociferous and sometimes led to violent disputes followed by blows.

This century was an era with a passion for law and theology. On the one hand, the Mu'tazilites in power in Ḳayrawān delved into the arsenal of dialectics, while, on the other hand, the Sunnites, who constituted a majority within the population and often played the part of the opposition, drew their inspiration from tradition. The ancients and the moderns were already at loggerheads.

Subsequently, from the mid-ninth century onwards, when Saḥnūn (777–854) expelled the 'myrmidons of heresy' from the Great Mosque of Ḳayrawān, at time when orthodoxy was beginning at last to gain the upper hand, the wrangling went on unabated. Disputes emerged and developed within Sunnism and similar feuds were occurring in the ranks of the Ibādites or Ṣufrites. Saḥnūn played a particularly decisive role in these developments, and his *Mudawwana*, a monumental legal compendium, led to the ultimate pre-eminence of the teachings of Mālik. Saḥnūn was to become venerated as a master and had a remarkable number of disciples, who spread the word not only in Ifriḳiya but also in Spain.

The period which we have just considered was a decisive one in the history of the Maghrib. It was then that this part of Africa acquired its independence, succeeded in tracing its borders, which have remained virtually unchanged to the present day, and fashioned the principal features of its cultural and spiritual identity.



The role of the Sahara and Saharians in the relationships between north and south

Despite its harsh climate and rugged nature, the Sahara, the world's largest desert, formed not only a barrier but also a link between the countries of northern Africa and the Sudan and played an extremely important role in relations, particularly in trade, between north and south. The rare and difficult caravan routes that crossed this desert were frequented, during the Muslim period, by traders from the Maghrib, Ifrikiya, Egypt and the various trade centres of the northern Sahara.

The population of the Sahara was mixed. The western and central Sahara was inhabited by peoples of Berber stock, sometimes crossed with black African blood. The eastern Sahara, including the Libyan desert, was also inhabited in its northern part by people of Berber stock, while its southern part was peopled by negroids belonging to the various Tubu peoples, such as the Zaghāwa, the Teda and the Daza. These peoples reached as far north as the Kufra and Taizerbo oases, i.e. around 26° latitude north.

The Berber population of the Sahara belonged to two main Berber branches, namely the Ṣanhādja and the Zanāta. The Ṣanhādja were mainly nomadic camel, sheep and goat breeders, whereas the Zanāta and the other Berber groups related to this branch, such as the Mazāta and Lawāta, were partly nomadic and partly sedentary peoples. Many impressive oases of the Algerian Sahara were founded by fractions of these groups, probably after the period of Roman domination. These people were experienced well-sinkers who bored underground water catchment and supply conduits, known as *kanāt* or *foggāra*. They also sank artesian wells there. These two practices have a very long history and it seems that the Zanāta learnt the art of boring *foggāras* and artesian wells from the ancient Libyco-Berber peoples of the eastern Sahara.

During this period, only the Tubu of the southern half of the eastern Sahara still observed their traditional religion. All the other Saharians, except perhaps a number of Judaized Zanāta in the northern Sahara, gradually became converted to Islam.

The Islamization of the Berbers inhabiting the Sahara began as early as the first half of the eighth century. It is very likely that the Ṣanhādja and the Zanāta of the Sahara, like the Berbers of North Africa, originally adopted the orthodox form of the Islamic faith. But later the North African Berbers rejected Sunnism owing to the political and fiscal oppression of the Umayyad Caliphs, and, around the middle of the eighth century, they joined – particularly the groups descended from the Zanāta – two *Khāridjite* sects opposed to the Sunna, namely the Ṣufrite sect (of left-wing tendencies) and the Ibādite sect (more moderate). The Saharian Zanāta, or at least some of them,

also adhered to these two sects. The Saharians descended from the Ṣanhādja, who were vaguely Muslim in the eighth century, did not become orthodox until the middle of the eleventh century, as a result of Almoravid propaganda. The Zanāta who lived in the villages of the Tripolitanian Sahara embraced early on the Ibādite faith adopted by their brethren in the eastern and central areas of the Berber region, who founded there several Imāmates or states, starting with a small Imāmate founded in the north-western part of Tripolitania and culminating in the Rustumid Imāmate of Tāhert, whose supremacy was recognized by all the Ibādite Berbers of North Africa.

The Miknāsa, who adopted the Ṣufrite beliefs, settled in Tafilālet, where they founded in 757 a small Ṣufrite state, the capital of which became the city of Sidjilmāsa. This city, governed by the dynasty of the Banū Midrār, soon became a major centre for trade with the Sudan as one of the termini of a caravan route linking North Africa to the ancient kingdom of Ghana, the 'land of gold' of the medieval Arab geographers. Through it passed a trade route to the city of Tāhert (present-day Tiāret), the capital of the Ibādite Imāmate of the Rustumids, which became an important political and economic centre. This notable market city attracted not only a large number of North African traders, both Ibādite and non-Ibādite, but also enterprising Arab merchants from Ḳayrawān, Baṣra and Kūfa.

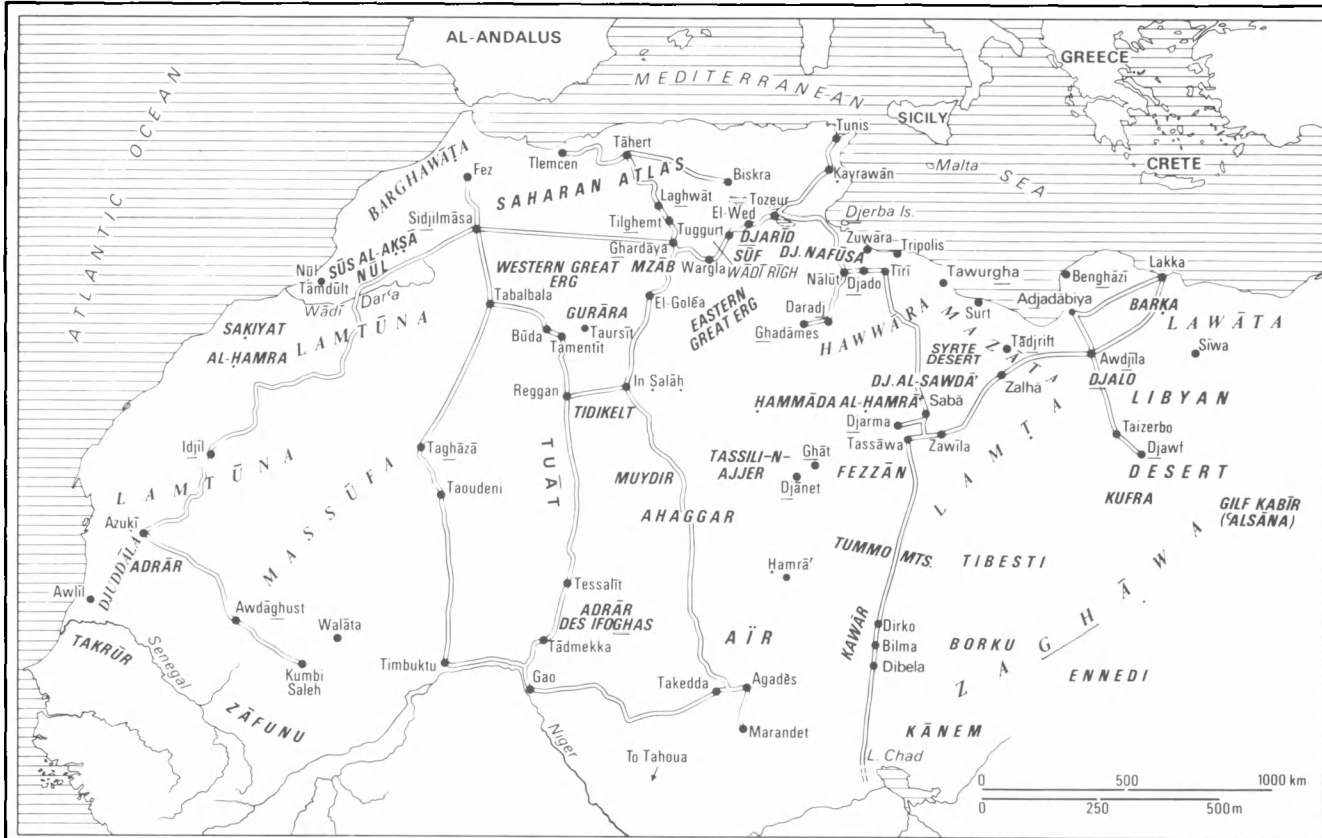
The Berber traders who engaged in these relations generally belonged to the various groups of the Zanāta, while the Saharians of Ṣanhādja stock often served as guides for the caravans equipped by North African traders and also escorted these caravans under the protection of the Ṣanhādja chiefs of Awdāghust, Tādmekka and other places.

The Libyan desert

Four oases in the Libyan desert, namely, *Khārja*, *Dākhlā*, *Farāfra* and *Bahriyya* (*Bahnāsāt al-Wāh*), formed, at the time of the Arab conquest of Egypt, a small state governed by the al-'Abdūn dynasty, of Lawāta Berber origin. This state was first mentioned in the latter half of the eighth century as 'Amal Wāh or the 'Land of the Oases'. In the tenth century a Berber prince, 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān, ruled there with several thousand horsemen under his command. In addition to the Lawāta Berbers, a large Christian population of Coptic origin and Arab nomads belonging to the Banū Hilāl *qabila* lived there. Several routes linked the Land of the Oases to the various Egyptian cities on the one side and the oasis of Santariya (*Siwa*) on the other. The oases contained a large number of date-palms and other fruit-trees, as well as alum-mines.

A route representing ten days' walking distance linked the oasis of *Bahnāsāt al-Wāh* (*Bahriyya*) to the oasis of Santariya or *Siwa* (formerly Ammonium), which was the meeting-point of all the western routes. The most important of these routes linked Santariya to Egypt on the one side and the Maghrib and Kawār on the other. Santariya appears to have long remained independent of Egypt and it was not until the thirteenth century that it was annexed to the province of Alexandria.

In the most remote part of the Land of the Oases there was a prosperous region, known as *Wāh Ṣebrū* or *Ṣhebrū*, to which access was very difficult and where, in the eleventh century, 'no one ever came except for a few travellers who had lost their way in the desert'. It abounded in date-palms, cereals and all kinds of fruit, as well as in



11.1 The Sahara. (I. Hrbek)

gold-mines; the mention of gold-mines is no more than an allusion to the trade with the western Sudan, whence gold used to be transported to Egypt. To the north-east of this city was a lake on whose banks people known as the Kawār (Tubu?) nomads camped.

This Šebrū or Shebrū (apparently derived from the Copt word for village, *tchobro*) is the Kufra group, where there is an abundance of water and date-, fig- and lemon-trees are grown, together with cereals. The present-day inhabitants belong to the Zāwiya people, Arabized Berbers who came down from the north around the middle of the eighteenth century and found there a non-Muslim people (Kufra – kufarā' = 'infidels') belonging to the Tubu, who then withdrew to the Tibesti mountain range or else were annihilated by the newcomers. There are today in the Kufra oasis only a few hundred individuals of Tubu origin, and they are completely Islamized and subject to the Arabs.

The ancient caravan route, which, before the tenth century, linked Egypt to Ghana and was alluded to by Ibn Ḥawḳal, probably passed through the Kufra oasis. This route was used earlier, in the time of Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn (868–84), and, after reaching Kufra, headed off in the direction of Wādī al-Namūs and Wādī al-Kabīr, passed through Fez-zān, and from there went to Kawār, Gao and, lastly, Ghana. This is the route which Ibn al-Faḳīh (903) described as follows: 'The route from Ghana to Egypt leads through the land of a people known as the Kāw-Kāw [Gao], then through that of a people known as the Maranda, then through that of a people known as the Murrawāt, and from there to the Egyptian oases in Malsāna.' Maranda is Marandet, an important watering-place south of Agadès, while Malsāna is probably the plateau of Gilf Kabīr, located to the west of Dākhlā.

To the west of Sīwa was situated the Awdjīla group of oases, which were famous for their date-trees. This group also included the city and oasis of Djalū (Djalo). The capital was Arzākīya and the whole region was covered with villages, and date- and fruit-trees. The population of Awdjīla was no doubt of Berber stock and was probably composed of groups of the Lāwāta, like the population of Santariya and Barḳa. Awdjīla was at the crossroads of several trade routes and was an important centre on a route to the Sudan. Through this oasis, access was gained to 'the greater part of the Land of the Blacks, for instance, to Kawār and Kāw-Kāw [Gao]'.

To the west of the oasis of Awdjīla stretched the province of Surt or Sirt, which took in all the eastern part of Tripolitania. This is a Saharan region, where the desert known by the name of the Syrte desert extends as far as Syrtis Major. Its inhabitants, who were traders, spoke 'a kind of dialect which was neither Arabic nor Persian nor Berber nor Copt'. It may conceivably have been ancient Punic.

The province of Surt was peopled by the Mazāta Berbers, whose neighbours were the Lāwāta of Barḳa and the Hawwāra who had settled in central Tripolitania. The western boundary of the territory of the Mazāta ran close to Tawargha, while in the south the area they inhabited extended beyond Djabal al-Sawdā. The desert city of Tādjrīft was peopled by a mixture of Mazāta and Arabs. During that period the oasis of Zālḥā (or Zella) also formed part of Mazāta territory.

The Mazāta of eastern Tripolitania came under the sway of Ibādism at an early date, the district of Surt being one of the provinces of the short-lived Ibādite state founded in Tripolitania by the Imām Abū'l-Khaṭṭāb 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Samḥ al-Ma'āfirī (757–61).

The Ibādite faith remained alive for a long time in Tripolitania and the Mazāta

continued to profess it until towards the end of the ninth century. The city of Waddān, to the south of Surt, was linked by a route to Magħmadās (the Macemades Selorum of ancient authors), situated on the Mediterranean coast, and to the city of Djarma (formerly Garama). This was no doubt the route used to import the slaves who made up the tribute paid to the Arabs by the people of Waddān. The slaves were black prisoners from the regions of Kawār, Tibesti and Kānem. Another route linking Waddān to Awdjila passed through the city of Zalhā (Zella), where dates were extremely plentiful.

The Arab sources do not make much mention of Hammāda al-Ḥamrā' and the surrounding mountains, with the exception of al-Bakrī, who gives a description of the route that led from the trading city of Djādū, capital of the eastern part of Djabal Nafūsa, to the city of Zawīla, the important caravanserai situated on the route leading to the region of Kawār and the other Lands of the Blacks. However, a three-day desert crossing on foot was necessary before reaching Tīrī or Tīra, a locality situated on a mountain-side and containing a large number of date-palms.

On the western borders of Hammāda al-Ḥamrā', between the plateaux and the Great Eastern Erg, lies the Saharan oasis and city of Ghadāmes. This locality, which already in antiquity was the most important stopping place in the desert (known as Cydamus or Kidamē), was the gateway through which merchants passed on their way from Tripolitania to the Land of the Blacks. The route that linked the trading city of Sharūs in Djabal Nafūsa to the Takrūr region passed through Ghadāmes. Right up to the present day, in the vicinity of Sharūs, it is possible to see a trail leading to Ghadāmes and going by the name or *trīk el-Sūdān* ('the Sudan trail'). This is the route which led to the region known as Zāfunu (Diafunu) in upper Senegal. It is likely that, after Ghadāmes, this route passed through the territory of the Askār Berbers (the present-day Tassili-n-Ajjer), eighteen days' walking distance from Ghadāmes.

The inhabitants of Ghadāmes had since ancient times been engaged in a limited form of agriculture – they grew mainly dates there – and also in trans-Saharan trade. The population of the city consisted of several Berber groups and the Berber language is still spoken in Ghadāmes.

The people of Ghadāmes adopted at a very early date the Ibādīte beliefs, apparently at the same time as their neighbours to the north, the Nafūsa, who inhabited present-day Djabal Nafūsa and with whom they had close relations.

At the beginning of the ninth century, the people of Ghadāmes took up the dissident doctrines of the Ibādīte sects of Khalafīya and Nukkār, and it was only through the military intervention of the Nafūsa that pure Ibādism–Wahbism was re-established.

Situated a short distance to the east of Ghadāmes are the oasis and city of Daradj, which was an important Ibādīte Berber centre. It is not inconceivable that Daradj derives its name from the Zanāta branch of the Banū Idradj. A route passing through Sināwan and Daradj linked Ghadāmes to the city of Nālūt (or Lālūt), situated in the western part of Djabal Nafūsa.

Between Fezzān and Lake Chad

In the southern part of Tripolitania lies Fezzān, a group of oases situated between

Hammāda al-Ḥamrā' in the north, Tassili-n-Ajjer in the west, the Tibesti foothills in the south and the Libyan desert in the east.

The ancient civilization of the Garamantes did not cease to exist until after the Arab conquest of the Maghrib, and there are now reasons for thinking (on the basis of the carbon-14 dating of certain excavated materials) that this civilization was not destroyed until between the eighth and tenth centuries. The main cause of the fall of the civilization of the Garamantes seems to have been the expedition led by the Arab general Ibn al-Ash'ath, who, in 762-3, conquered the kingdom of Zawīla in eastern Fezzān and massacred the inhabitants of the capital. It should be pointed out, however, that the kingdom of Zawīla survived this shock and still existed as an independent state around the end of the ninth century.

The kingdom of Zawīla took in only part of present-day eastern Fezzān. It was founded either in the late seventh century or in the early eighth century. The rest of Fezzān formed a separate kingdom, an outgrowth of the kingdom of the Garamantes, which is referred to by the medieval Arab authors by the name of Fezzān.

This state is mentioned in Arab sources as early as 666, when 'Uḡba ibn Nāfi', after conquering Waddān, set off for the city of Djarma, capital of Greater Fezzān, whose king surrendered and whose inhabitants were converted to Islam. 'Uḡba ibn Nāfi' then made his way to the other 'castles' of Fezzān, going right up to the ones furthest north.

Starting from the late eighth century, the inhabitants of Fezzān became Ibādites and, from the outset, they recognized the supremacy of the Rustumid Imāms of Tāhert. For some time, however, they were followers of the Ibādite heretic Khalaf ibn al-Samḥ. At the end of the ninth century, Fezzān formed a vast state governed by an independent chief (*rā'is*).

Djarma, the capital of Fezzān, flourished for several hundred years up to the twelfth century. At that time, in addition to Djarma, there was also in Fezzān another large city, Tassāwa (Tessaoua), which the 'Blacks' (Fezzānis?) called 'Little Djarma'. The Arab sources also mention other cities in Fezzān such as Tāmarmā, situated on the route leading to Djādū in Djabal Nafūsa. This city is completely unknown to us and its name should be corrected to read 'Tāmzawā', i.e. present-day Tamzaua (Tamséua). Another large city was Sabhā, which is to be identified with the present capital of Fezzān and which possessed a cathedral mosque and several market-places.

The population of medieval Fezzān was made up of various ethnic groups forming a people known as the Fezzān. In addition to the Fezzān, there were also other Berber groups in this region. Al-Bakrī mentions the Banū Kaldīn (or Kildīn), who inhabited the city of Tāmarmā (Tāmzawā), together with the Fezzān and were related to the Hawwāra.

The inhabitants of Djarma (and apparently of all the other 'castles' of Fezzān), who, as early as the year 569, were Christians, were converted to Islam following the Arab invasion of 666-7. They subsequently took part in the Ibādite movement in Tripolitania and suffered losses, like the Ibādites of Waddān and those of Zawīla, following the expedition led by the Abbasid general Ibn al-Ash'ath (762-3). At the time of the Rustumid Imām 'Abd al-Wahhāh ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān (d. 823), the Fezzani were already Ibādites.

The Ibādites of Fezzān appear, in the early ninth century, to have been thrown in their

lot with the Ibādite dissident Khalaf ibn al-Samḥ who, having revolted against the Rustumid *Imāms* of Tāhert, succeeded in bringing almost all of Tripolitania under his sway, with the exception of Djabal Nafusa, whose inhabitants, who professed the Ibādite-Wahbite religion, remained faithful to the Rustumids. However, during the early half of the ninth century, Fezzān was again regarded as a region with an Ibādite-Wahbite population.

The second state that existed in Fezzān between the eighth and twelfth century, the kingdom of Zawīla, owes its name to the city of Zawīla, its capital. It appears in the sources for the first time in the eighth century at the time of the wars between the Sunnite Arabs and the Ibādite Berbers. After the victory achieved, in 761-2, by Ibn al-Ash'ath over Abū 'l-Khaṭṭāb, the Ibādite *Imām* of Ifrīkiya, the Arab army captured the city of Zawīla, whose Ibādite Berber inhabitants were put to the sword. Despite these occurrences, Zawīla long remained a major Ibādite centre.

At the beginning of the tenth century, the city of Zawīla was abandoned, probably after the war waged by its inhabitants on the Mazāta of eastern Tripolitania, but it was rebuilt in 918 to serve as a residence for the dynasty of Banū 'l-Khaṭṭāb, who descended from the Mazāta.

The chief resources of the Fezzān were crops, particularly palm-trees and millet and barley. The irrigation technique of *foggāras* (underground catchment conduits) became widespread in Fezzān at the end of the Roman period; the crop-growing area in Zawīla was irrigated by means of wells operated by camels, which are still used in Fezzān, or by means of a machine known as an *indjāfa*, which the inhabitants of the Maghrib knew by the name of *khaṭṭāra*.

Beside crop-growing, Fezzān's main activity was trans-Saharan trade, this region being, after the Nile, historically the most important channel of communication with the countries south of the Sahara. The ancient Garamantes already brought to the Tripolitanian ports products from their country as well as from the interior of Africa, such as dates, ivory and precious stones known as 'garamantiques'. Trade was carried on along a very ancient route which linked Tripoli with Kawār and Kānem in the central Sudan. It led through the city of Zawīla and Djabal Nafusa. Trans-Saharan trade was the reason for the settlement in Zawīla, alongside the Ibādite Berbers, of people of highly varied stock, originating from Khurāsān, Baṣra and Kūfa. The Zawīla traders also exported black slaves captured from the Sudanese peoples of Mīrī, Murrū, Zaghāwa and others, most of whom belonged to the Teda-Daza group.

Three routes connected the city of Zawīla with Tripolitania and Egypt. The first went to the city of Djadū and then to Tripoli, while the second linked Zawīla to the city of Adjadābiya at the eastern edge of Tripolitania, and the third route led from Zawīla to Fustāt, the capital of Egypt. The best known oases on the southern route were those of Kawār. In 666-7, when 'Uḳba ibn Nāfi' took possession of all the *ḡsurs* (castles of Fezzān), the chief one was al-Ḳaṣaba (or al-Gaṣba), a very large fortress. South of al-Ḳaṣaba was situated Ankalās (present-day Dirki), the largest city in Kawār and the most important as regards trade, and at the same time the place of residence of the local chief. The southernmost place in Kawār was the small city of Tamalma (or Talamla), identical with the modern town of Bilma (or rather Bilmā).

At the end of the ninth century, the region of Kawār was inhabited by a mixed

population, made up of Muslims of every origin, the majority of whom were Berbers. Alongside the Berbers and also the Arab traders there lived an autochthonous population belonging to the Tubu (Teda-Daza) group. Already in the ninth century this population was Muslim and probably Ibādīte.

The wealth of the inhabitants of Kawār derived from crops (dates), the mining of alum, and trade, particularly the slave-trade. Camels were also bred there for the use of local traders; fish that abounded in a large lake in the vicinity of Abzar were caught and salted. The main source of wealth of the inhabitants of Kawār came from the mines, which contained a variety of alum, known by the name of *kawānī*, whose exceptional purity is praised by Arab writers. These mines were located to the south of Kawār, in Ankalās and Abzar. Another source of revenue of the inhabitants of Kawār was the slave-trade. Large numbers of black slaves were brought through Kawār to the markets of Djarma, Zawila and Waddān, whence they were exported to the Maghrib and Ifrikiya, as well as to Egypt. Apparently this trade already existed in antiquity and was practised by the Garamantes.

The ancient and medieval history of Kawār is not known to us. It seems that in the ninth century this region was independent, but later the sultanate of Kawār was brought under the dominion of the kingdom of Zaghāwa or Kānem.

Alongside the Tubu Kawarians and the Ibādīte Berbers who, together with Arab traders, inhabited the oases of Kawār, Lamṭa Berbers also lived in this region of the Sahara, most of whom led a nomadic existence in the western Sahara, especially to the south of Sūs.

The Tubu or Teda-Daza-Zaghāwa, who have since very early times occupied the oases of Kufra in the Libyan desert, as well as the region of Kawār, also constituted the population of the southern fringe of Fezzān, the D̄jādo plateau and the Tibesti mountain range. They also inhabited Borku, which is a low-lying desert basin between Tibesti and Chad, as well as the plateaux of Ennedi and the areas to the north of Wadaī and to the north-west of Darfūr. The Tubu group still living in the last-mentioned areas even today goes by the name of the Zaghāwa. This name seems, at the time, to have been the term used by the Arab geographers to designate virtually all the branches of the Tubu, with the exception of the Goran and the nomadic inhabitants of Kawār. The regions to the south of Kawār already formed part of the kingdom of Kānem, whose history is discussed in Chapter 15.

The northern Sahara

The oases of the northern Sahara can be divided into three groups:

- (1) The eastern oases, irrigated by artesian wells, concentrated around the foot of the Atlas.
- (2) The western oases, which are irrigated by *foggāras*, forming a strip some 1,200 km long running between Figuīg on one side and Tidikelt on the other.
- (3) Half-way between these two groups lies a third important group of oases – the Mzāb.

The most easterly of these three groups of oases is that of Sūf, surrounded on all sides by the sand, on the route that leads from D̄jarīd to Tuggurt and Wargla. From the beginning of the period of Arab domination in North Africa, this oasis was of some

importance, being one of the stages on the trade route linking southern Tunisia, inhabited by the Ibādīte Berbers, to the other Ibādīte centres of Wādī Rīgh and Wargla and also to the Sudan.

The inhabitants of Sūf belonged to various branches descended from the Zanāta or related to that Berber family (like the Lawāta). To the north of it, towards the district of Nefzāwa, lived the nomadic Banū Mūlīt, who also formed part of the Zanāta.

To the west of the oasis of Sūf are to be found the large oases of Wādī Rīgh, situated in a gully twenty kilometres wide. In the period under consideration, Wādī Rīgh was dotted with several cities and fortified villages (*kusur*). Rīgh or Arīgh derives its name from the Rīgha Berbers, a group of the Maghrāwa belonging to the great Zanāta family. In addition to the Rīgha, there were other Zanāta groups, such as the Banū Wartizalen, Banū Wīlīl, Banū Zalghīn, Banū Itūfa, Maghrāwa, Banū Yandjāsen and Banū Lant. Among other Berbers who inhabited Wādī Rīgh or led a nomadic existence in its vicinity, mention should be made of the Banū Warmāz (Warzemār) and the three peoples who lived as Bedouins, the Banū Warsifān, the Banū Ghomāra (or Ghomra) and the Banū Sindjāsen.

Very little is known about the history of Wādī Rīgh prior to the twelfth century. In the latter half of the tenth century, the population of Wādī Rīgh was mainly composed of various groups of Ibādīte Maghrāwa. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the oases of Wādī Rīgh played an important role in the lives of the North African Ibādītes, but civil wars in 1078 and 1108 caused a decline in their importance.

The most important of all the eastern oases of the northern Sahara was that of Wargla, known to the medieval Arab geographers as Wārdjīlān or Wārklān. We know nothing about the origins of Wargla, having no information regarding this oasis prior to the Arab conquest. However, it is not impossible that, at the time of the later Byzantine empire, there already existed at that location a village which was a stage on the caravan route linking Numidia to the Hoggar and also probably to the loop of the Niger. The name 'Wargla' can be found in that of the Moorish group of the *Urceliani*, who built certain dwellings in Wargla at a time prior to the Muslim invasion. There were also in the oasis of Wargla, at the time of the arrival of the first Arabs, several actual towns, whose ruins are still visible.

The inhabitants of Wargla very soon adopted the Khāridjite doctrines in protest against the oppressive rule of the orthodox government. They became Ibādītes, adhering to the most moderate branch of that sect, and soon entered into close relations with the Ibādīte *Imāms* of Tāhert.

Sadrāta or Sedrāta seems to have been the capital of the oasis of Wargla between the tenth and twelfth centuries. The name of this city derives from that of the Sadrāta Berbers, another group of which inhabited the Mzāb, in the vicinity of Biskra. The ruins of Sadrāta are fourteen kilometres south of the city of Wargla. In these ruins, vestiges have been found of a mosque and of the tomb of the *Imām* Ya'kub ibn Aflāh, the last Rustumid *Imām*, who fled to Wargla following the capture of Tāhert by the Fātimid army in 908. In 934, the city of Sadrāta was besieged by the Fātimid army and its inhabitants abandoned the city and took refuge in Kaṛīma (the present-day Gara Krīma, south of Wargla).

We have some information about the composition of the population of the oasis of



11.2 Tenth-century mosque in the city of Tozeur, *Djārid*. (M. Brett)

Wargla between the eighth and twelfth centuries. The *Wārdjīlān*, who founded it, were a branch of the *Zanāta*, but among the early inhabitants there was also a group of the *Sadrāta*, who belonged to a branch of the *Lawāta*. Among other Berbers who inhabited the oasis of Wargla, mention should be made of the *Banū Yādjrīn* (or *Yāgrīn*), the *Tināwata*, who are known from *Ghadāmes*; the *Banū Warzemār*, a group of which led a nomadic existence in the vicinity of *Wādī Rīgh*; and the great tribe of the *Banū Wartizalen* who also inhabited *Wādī Rīgh* at an earlier date. It appears that the Berber inhabitants of *Rīgh* and Wargla had already largely interbred with the blacks before the twelfth century.

All the towns and cities of the oasis of Wargla formed part of a district known as *iklīm Wārdjīlān* ('district of *Wārdjīlān*'). At the beginning of the tenth century, the oasis of Wargla was governed by a *rā'īs* ('chief') who lived in *Tāghyārt*; the *wulāt Wārdjīlān* ('governors of *Wārdjīlān*') were no doubt subordinate to this *rā'īs*. In the early half of the eleventh century there were in Wargla twenty-three *mutawallī*, probably town administrators, about whose powers, however, we know nothing. In addition to the *rā'īs* and governors, some sources mention the existence in Wargla of notables (who probably consisted primarily of the leading merchants), known as *a'yān* and *akābir*. Some role was also played by councils in which the inhabitants of all the villages in that oasis were represented. These councils met in the village of *Tamāwāt*.

After the fall of the Rustumid *Imāmate*, whose sovereignty was recognized by the inhabitants of Wargla, this oasis became completely independent despite the efforts of the *Fāṭimids*, who, in the early half of the tenth century, attempted to conquer it, no doubt because of its economic importance. Later it was for some time ruled by the dynasty of the *Banū Ḥammād*, represented by a governor.

The commercial role of Wargla was considerable, owing to the fact that this city was the starting-point for the route followed by all the North African and Egyptian merchants who travelled to the western Sudan.

As early as the mid-ninth century, a direct route linked Wargla to Tāhert, while another trade route existed between Wargla and the city of Sidjilmāsa, which constituted the most important northern terminus of the caravan routes between northern Africa and the western Sudan and was the destination of the gold and slaves from Ghana and the land of Wanḡāra (Mali). Originally Wargla was merely one of the stopping-places on the great route between the Sudan and Egypt; this route passed through Tripolitania and Djarīd on its way first to Wargla and then to Sidjilmāsa. However, the merchants of Wargla soon began to take an active part in the trade between Sidjilmāsa and the gold-bearing lands of the western Sudan.

The most ancient and, at the same time, the most direct route linking Wargla – and thereby the whole of the Maghrib – to the Sudan was that from Wargla to Tādmekka in the Adrār des Ifoghas and from there to the city of Gao. This route began in Tādmekka and went to Ḳayrawān, passing through Wargla and Ḳaṣṣīliya (Tozeur). The trade between Wargla and Tādmekka was carried on as early as the latter half of the tenth century; one of the main items traded was clothing, which was exchanged for gold.

In addition to the Wargla-Tādmekka-Gao route, there was another major trans-Saharan route which linked Wargla to the markets of the western Sudan. This was the Wargla-Ghana route, which was far more important than the Wargla-Tādmekka one, since the city of Ghana was a major storage place for the gold brought from the gold-bearing regions of Bambuk and Buré. The Wargla-Ghana route passed through the city of Sidjilmāsa, the true gateway to the Sudan. The sovereigns of Sidjilmāsa (who belonged to the Miknāsa and were therefore related to the Zanāta) professed the beliefs of the Ṣufrite sect, which was closely related to those of the Ibādites, and were on respectful terms with the Rustumid *Imāms* of Tāhert. The Wargla-Ghana route, after leaving Sidjilmāsa, went on to the city of Tāmdūlt in Sūs al-Aḳṣā. We know of this route thanks to al-Bakrī, who also gives us the names of the subsequent two stages, namely Īzil (Kēdiat d'Idjīl) and the city of Awdāghust, an important market in the southern part of present-day Mauritania, where the ruins of Tegdaoust now lie. The route from Sidjilmāsa to Ghana also passed through the city of Azuḳī (Azūgi) in the Mauritanian Adrār. There was also another route from Wargla to Ghana, which passed through Tādmekka. The most direct route between Wargla and Tāhert passed through the region of the Mzāb, through Tilghment and Laghwāt, i.e. through the middle group of oases of the northern Sahara, situated between Wādī Rīgh and Wargla on one side, and Tuwāt-Gurāra on the other.

The name of the Mzāb derives from that of a Zanāta group which founded the villages in this region. The Banū Mzāb and the region itself were known as early as the ninth century by the Arabized name of Mus'ab. They originally professed the Mu'tazilite doctrine, but (in the eleventh century) they were later converted to the Ibādite faith.

Among the towns founded in the northern Sahara by the Zanāta, mention should be made of the fortress of Tālgement (the present-day Tilghment or Tiltremt) and the city of Laghouat (Laghwāt), which was already known in the tenth century by the name of al-Aghwāt. Another important city in this region was the ḳsar El-Goléa,

where the route leading from Wargla to Tādmekka branched off. El-Golea (correctly al-Ḳal'a, 'the Fortress') was a highly populated city which contained a mosque and the remains of a few ancient monuments.

The western group of oases in the northern Sahara is formed by Gurāra, Tuwāt and Tidikelt, which possess a clearly marked geographical unity. Of these three, Gurāra is the most populated and has the most water and palm-trees. Tuwāt forms a 'street of palm-trees' more than 200 km long between Būda and Taurīrt; it is less heavily populated than Gurāra, but the number of palm-trees it contains is slightly higher than in Gurāra. The oases of the western group are irrigated by means of underground water catchment and supply conduits, known as *foggāras*.

The history of Gurāra, Tuwāt and Tidikelt up to the fourteenth century is virtually unknown. It is generally assumed that all these oases were established only recently, in the sixth century of the Christian era in the case of Gurāra and as late as the seventeenth century in the case of some of the oases of Tidikelt. In Tamentūt in Tuwāt, a stone idol with a ram's head has been found, which gives grounds for thinking that this place was inhabited before the Islamic period by a Libyco-Berber people, probably originating from eastern Libya, where they adopted, perhaps in Siwa, the cult of Ammon with the ram's horns. These newcomers also learned from the eastern Libyans the art of boring *foggāras*.

As for the Judaization of the Saharan Berbers, this probably began in the second century of the Christian era and was the consequence of the dispersal of the Jews of Cyrenaica, who, after the repression ordered by the Roman emperor Trajan, fled to Mauritania and the Sahara.

The Zanāta groups made a further thrust towards Gurāra and Tuwāt in the mid-eleventh century, pushed by the invasion of the Banū Hilāl and also by that of the Almoravids in Morocco, following which some of the Berbers, Zanāta and others, either Muslim or converted to Judaism, escaped to the Sahara.

The central Sahara

In the centre of the Sahara and to the south of El-Goléa and Wargla lies a highland region known as Ahaggar or the Hoggar, which extends north-east into Tassili-n-Ajjer and westwards into Muysdir. Two other massifs form a continuation of Ahaggar southwards, namely the Aīr and Adrār des Ifoghas. These Saharan regions were peopled between the eighth and twelfth centuries by various Berber groups descended from the branch known as the Ṣanhādja, who were the ancestors of the present-day Tuareg. During this period no large city or palm grove existed in the Ahaggar or Tassili-n-Ajjer.

In the Adrār des Ifoghas and Aīr, on the contrary, there were true cities, whose inhabitants engaged in trade but where there was – with the exception of Tādmekka in the Adrār des Ifoghas – a complete lack of palm-trees and gardens (*aghren*).

Tassili-n-Ajjer derives its name from the Adjdjer or Azger Berbers, who were camel-drivers and whose political centre may have been in the region of present-day Ghāt or Djānet, eighteen days' walking distance from Ghādāmes and twelve from the city to Tassāwa in Fezzān. The latter route seems to be identical with the ancient route of the 'Garamantean chariots' which, in the first millennium before the Christian era,

linked Fezzān to Gao, passing through the region of Adjdjer, Ahaggar and the Adrār des Ifoghas. The existence of this ancient route is proved by the discoveries of Abalessa and by a number of ancient coins found in the vicinity.

We know very little about the history of Ahaggar in the period under discussion. According to a local tradition, there lived in Ahaggar before Islamic times an idolatrous Tuareg-speaking peoples by the name of Isebeten, who practised a pre-Tuareg form of agriculture (fig-trees, vines and palm groves) and possessed irrigation channels. The present-day tribe of the Dag-Ghālī claims to be descended from these Isebeten and to be the true owners of the land. Later Ahaggar was invaded by the Lamṭa and then by the Hawwāra, who gave it its name (through the change of the Berber phoneme *wu* into *gg*, attested by Ibn Khaldūn). According to that author, a group of the Hawwāra crossed the sands and settled alongside the 'veil-wearing' Lamṭa, who lived near the city of Kāw-Kāw (Gao) in the 'Land of the Blacks'. It seems that the arrival of the Ahaggar-Hawwāra in the territory where they now live must have been related to the defeat inflicted upon the Hawwāra of Awrās by the Fāṭimid prince al-Mu'izz in 953 and to the routing of these rebels, some of whom fled 'as far as the Land of the Blacks', apparently in the direction of present-day Ahaggar.

Several regions or places in the Aïr were already known in the ninth century. Al-Ya'qūbī mentions, among the kingdoms under the sway of the Sudanese state of Kāw-Kāw, three kingdoms which, in all likelihood, were located in the Aïr. These were the kingdoms of Maranda, al-Hazban (in the manuscript al-Harbar) and Tikarkarīn (in the manuscript Tidkarīr). The first of these kingdoms derives its name from the small town and water-hole (the present-day Marendet) situated to the south of Agadès. The remains of an ancient village can still be seen there, together with the vestiges of an ancient copper foundry. The people known as the Maranda lived to the north of Kāw-Kāw and their 'land' (or rather their capital) was a stopping-place on the major trans-Saharan route leading from Gao to the oases of Egypt. In the latter half of the tenth century, it was a stage on the route leading from Ghana to Adjdābiya in Cyrenaica. It lay one month's walking distance away from the city of Kāw-Kāw, representing the next stage (after Gao) on this route, which then passed through the city of Zawīla in Fezzān. Maranda was a highly populated city, a refuge and a place of rest for those who came and went in the course of their travels and expeditions. Al-Hazban (al-Hazbin) is identical with Azben or Azbin, the early name of Aïr, used by the black or half-breed population of that region. The third kingdom is known under the name of Tikarkarīn; this is the Berber feminine plural of Tararkart, a name which reappears on our maps as Tacarcart. It is situated half-way between Tahua and Agadès, in a region where there is no lack of evidence of an ancient civilization. In the fourteenth century, Ibn Baṭṭūta spoke of a Berber sultan by the name of al-Takarkarī who had a dispute with the sultan of Takedda (the present-day Azelik in the south-western part of the Aïr).

The massif of the Adrār des Ifoghas was known to the early Arab geographers mainly on account of the city of Tādmekka (today the ruins of Es-Suk, 45 km north of the present-day village of Kidal), which was its political centre. Tādmekka was also an important stage on the caravan route leading from Gao to Ghadāmes and Tripoli. Nine days' walking distance lay between Gao and Tādmekka and forty between Tādmekka and Ghadāmes, by way of the region of Saghmāra and four deserts.

The *Saghmāra* were Berbers who lived in the region to the north, or rather the north-east, of *Tādmekka*. They also inhabited the area under the dominion of *Tādmekka* which lay south of this city, opposite the city of *Gao*. This group can be identified with the *Tuareg Isekkamaren* (sing. *Asekkamar*), some of whom still nomadize today in the *Adrār des Ifoghas*.

Tādmekka already existed in the ninth century and was an important trade centre, visited mainly by *Ibādite* Berber merchants from *Wargla*, *Djarid* and *Djabal Nefūsa*, who frequented this city to obtain the gold which was brought in large quantities from the gold-bearing areas near *Ghana*. It also served as a storage place for merchandise from the *Maghrib*, especially clothing, which was brought in by the *Wargla* route. *Tādmekka* was better constructed than *Ghana* and *Gao* but had no crops. In the tenth century, *Tādmekka* formed a state governed by the kings belonging to the *Banū Tādmāk* (a branch of the *Ṣanhādja*). However, the inhabitants of that city did not belong to the Berber branch of the *Ṣanhādja*, but to the *Zanāta*. While the *Zanāta* inhabitants of the capital were *Ibādite* Muslims from the ninth century onwards, the *Ṣanhādja* of *Tādmāk* did not become Muslims until 1109.

Another city, *Tasalit*, is an old site where ancient mines have been discovered and where there were copper and an ore slightly reminiscent of turquoise, formerly used to make the famous 'pearls of *Gao*'. It was nine days' walking distance from *Tādmekka*, which suggests that it corresponds to present-day *Tasalit*, lying 180 km north of *Es-Sūk* in a straight line. The people of *Tasalā/Tasalī*, like those of *Tādmekka*, were at war with the inhabitants of *Ghana* and were converted to Islam in 1109.

Six days' walking distance from *Tādmekka* lay a region known as *Tūtak* or *Tawtak*, which possessed underground salt-mines. The province of *Tūtak* derives its name from a branch of the *Ṣanhādja*. It is not possible to ascertain the exact whereabouts of this region, although its name, as well as that of the tribe of the *Tūtak*, may well be connected with that of the *Tāitok*, a noble *Tuareg* group now living in *Ahnet*, a region to the north of the *Adrār des Ifoghas* and to the north-west of *Tamanraset*.

The western Sahara

The ethnic and political situation of this part of the Sahara, which extended westwards from the *Adrār des Ifoghas* and southwards from Morocco, is fairly well known, thanks to Arab sources.

The earliest information concerns the expedition led by the general 'Uḳba ibn Nāfi' in southern Morocco, who in 682 entered the province of *as-Sūs al-Aḳṣā* and even crossed its southern borders into the Sahara, where 'he attacked the *Massūfa* and, having taken many of them prisoners, retraced his steps'.

The purpose of this expedition was not the permanent Arab conquest and Islamization of southern Morocco and the western Sahara, although a medieval Arab historian speaks of the conversion to Islam, under the pressure of this general, of the southern Moroccan Berbers of the *Djazūla* group. Its purpose was rather to reconnoitre the gold-bearing regions of the western Sudan, and in this it was similar to that undertaken by the same 'Uḳba ibn Nāfi' in 666-7 in order to survey the trade route leading from the coast of Tripolitania through *Fezzān* and *Kawār* to Lake Chad.

Between 705–6 and 708–9, Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr penetrated as far as the region of as-Sūs al-Akṣā, whose inhabitants adopted the Islamic faith and received as their governor Marwān, the son of Mūsā ibn Nuṣayr.

But it was not until the expedition led by the Arab general Ḥabīb b. Abī 'Ubayda (between 734 and 740) that this province was finally conquered and converted to Islam. This expedition was directed not only against southern Morocco but also against the western Sudan. Ḥabīb ibn Abī 'Ubayda returned victorious from this expedition, bringing back a large number of prisoners and a considerable quantity of gold.

His son Ismā'il continued the expeditions against the nomadic Berbers of the western Sahara. One of his commanders claimed: 'I organized twenty war expeditions against the land of Anbiya, starting from as-Sūs al-Akṣā. I saw the Nile [i.e. the Senegal river]; between that river and a salt sea [i.e. the Atlantic Ocean] stood a sandy hill at the foot of which the river had its source.'

This account contains the first reference to the name *Anbiya* (the pronunciation of which is uncertain) to designate the territories lying between as-Sūs al-Akṣā and the Senegal river. At the end of the ninth century, al-Ya'qūbī speaks of the Anbiya as a Berber people of the Ṣanhādja group, whose country extended from Sidjilmāsa to the city and Berber kingdom of Ḡhast (referred to by other authors as Awdāghust) on the south-eastern fringe of the territories with which we are concerned here. This mysterious name seems to designate the most ancient federation of Berbers in the western Sahara, composed of the Massūfa, Lamtūna and Djuddāla.

It appears, however, that the Arab expeditions lasted only a short time and that fairly soon an agreement was reached between the Muslims of North Africa and the chiefs of the Anbiya federation, which subsequently made it possible to pacify the territories of the western Sahara. This gave rise to favourable conditions for trans-Saharan trade and for the propagation of the Muslim religion, which were brought about mainly by the North African merchants who were at the same time missionaries preaching the Faith of the Prophet. It is in our view to this brief period that the following words of Ibn Khaldūn refer: 'At the time of the conquest of northern Africa [by the Arabs], a few merchants made their way into the western part of the Land of the Blacks, where they found no king more powerful than the king of Ghana.'

The first Ṣanhādja chief in the western Sahara was Tilūtān ibn Tiklān (or Itlūtān ibn Talākākīn) of the Lamtūna, who reigned over all the desert and more than twenty Sudanese kings paid him tribute. His territory extended over an area 'three months long and three months wide'. He died at the age of eighty, in 837. His grandson, al-Athīr ibn Bātin, succeeded him and reigned until 900. The last king of the state of the Ṣanhādja was the son of al-Athīr, Tamīm, who ruled over these tribes until 918. He was slain by the Ṣanhādja notables, who rose up against him. As a result, a breach occurred between the Ṣanhādja tribes, and it was not until 120 years later that they reunited under the command of the emir Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Tīfāt (Tīfawt), known by the name of Tārsina, one of the chiefs of the Lamtūna (1035), whose reign lasted only three years. His brother-in-law, Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm, a Djuddālī, then became the chief of the federation of the Ṣanhādja. It was this man who brought back with him 'Abd Allāh ibn Yāsīn, the founder of the Almoravid movement.

According to a tradition, supreme authority among the Ṣanhādja lay with the

Lamtūna, who already formed a large kingdom in the second half of the eighth century.

The most famous of the Ṣanhādja kings, who reigned 'throughout the Sahara' during the tenth century, was Tinazwa ibn Wanshik ibn Bizār, also known as Barūyān ibn Washik ibn Izār. This prince is the same one known to al-Bakrī by the name of Tin Yarūtān ibn Wīsnū ibn Nazār, who reigned between 961 and 974. Ibn Ḥawḳal mentions King Tanbarūtān ibn Isfīshār, whom he calls the 'prince of all the Ṣanhādja' and who may also have been the same person.

To the south of the land of Anbiya lay the region known as Ghast, a pagan kingdom whose king made forays into the Land of the Blacks. Some of the inhabitants of this region lived in permanent settlements. It consisted of the Berber city and kingdom better known to the ancient Arab authors by the name of Awdāghust, which was an important trade centre, ten days' march from the city of Ghana. Our source for this information is the Arab geographer and traveller, Ibn Ḥawḳal, who passed through Awdāghust in 951-2 and who adds that two months' march lay between Awdāghust and the city of Sidjilmāsa. Awdāghust contained fine markets, and travellers flocked in from all sides; the inhabitants were Muslims. The chief of the region was a man belonging to the Ṣanhādja *ḳabīla*.

From 961 to 971, the state of Awdāghust was ruled by the above-mentioned Tin Yarūtān from the *ḳabīla* of the Ṣanhādja, so that for a while the kingdom of Awdāghust belonged to the federation of the Ṣanhādja *ḳabīla*.

Later, the Berber king of Awdāghust recognized (up to 1054) the supremacy of the black king of Ghana (unlike the Lamtūna, Massūfa and Djuddāla, who were not dependent on Ghana). Awdāghust at that time was a large, densely populated city whose numerous and wealthy population was composed of Arabs and Berbers (including members of the Nafūsa, Lawāta, Zanāta, Nafzāwa and also the Berkadjāna *ḳabīla*). In the Awdāghust market purchases were made with gold dust. Awdāghust apparently corresponds to Tegdaoust, the ruins of which lie to the south-west of Tichitt (some 200 km away) and west-north-west of Kumbi Saleh (or old Ghana) at a distance of some 400 km.

Most of the inhabitants of the western Sahara in these centuries were Berbers of the Ṣanhādja branch (Lamtūna, Massūfa and Djuddāla). The Lamtūna and Djuddāla lived in the far south of the Islamic region, in the neighbourhood of the blacks, and once formed part of the great Ṣanhādja state of Anbiya. According to al-Idrīsī, the region of Tāzukkāght (the present-day Sakiyyat al-Ḥamrā) belonged to the Lamtūna. The territories of the Lamtūna also took in, to the north, the region of Nūl in southern Morocco. Further south, their territories extended to Izal (or Ayzal), which corresponds to present-day Kédia d'Idjil. Around the year 1054-5, the Lamtūna also occupied the Mauritanian Adrār (Adrār Tmār), subsequently known as Djabal Lamtūna; this was a region covered with date plantations planted by a people who had settled in the area long before, the Bafūr, as they are referred to by local tradition and by certain Portuguese authors. The chief city of Djabal Lamtūna was Azuḳī, which grew up around the Almoravid fortress of the same name. It was an important stopping-place on the route leading from Sidjilmāsa to the western Sudan. The blacks knew this city by the name of Kūkadam (al-Idrīsī) or Kākadam. It corresponds to present-day Azougui, a small settlement possessing ancient Almoravid and pre-Almoravid ruins in northern Mauritania, not far from the modern town of Atār.

The Massūfa lived in the desert in the region traversed by the route linking the city of Sidjilmāsa to the city of Ghana. Around the mid twelfth century, the Massūfa went as far south as the city of Asuķī. In the south-east lay the salt-works of Taghāzā, which came into their possession; through this area passed the caravan route leading to Iwālāten (or Walāta), an important trade centre on the southern edge of the western Sahara.

To the south-west of the territory occupied by the Lamtūna lived the Djuddāla, who were probably descendants of the ancient Getulians. They dwelt directly to the north of lower Senegal near the sea, from which they were separated by no other group. The Djuddāla thus inhabited present-day south-west Mauritania and also the area surrounding al-Djabal al-Lammā' (Cap-Blanc).

It emerges from archaeological excavations as well as from oral traditions that in certain areas of the western Sahara, alongside the nomad population, there were also groups of agriculturalists whose descendants have survived to the present day. According to some Portuguese sources, they belonged to two groups. The white agriculturalists were known as the Baffor or Abofur (in local traditions Bafūr) and the black agriculturalists as the Barbar (Barbara, Barābir, Barbaros), who were related to the Soninke.

The most ancient of these groups left a considerable number of ruined villages and archaeological sites in the Mauritanian Adrār. These ancient sites are attributed by local traditions to a mysterious people known as the Baffor, Abofur or Bafūr, who inhabited the Mauritanian Adrār just before the arrival of the Lamtūna. According to some traditions, the Bafūr were whites (which the author considers to be the most likely) belonging to the Berber *kaḃīla* of the Zanāta. According to Mauritanian tradition, the non-Muslim autochthonous inhabitants of Adrār Tmār were agriculturalists and were responsible for the planting of the first palm-trees in Adrār. The Bafūr might, we think, be identified with the Libyan (Moorish) *kaḃīla* of the Bavares, who were active in the western part of North Africa in the third and fourth centuries of the Christian era. They subsequently emigrated to present-day Mauritania, and left their culture and their name to the inhabitants of Adrār Tmār, which, in the early sixteenth century, was still known as the 'mountain of Baffor'.

According to twelfth-century Arab sources, the blacks known as the Barbar or Barbara (Arabic plural, Barābir) formed the population of the Sudanese land of Zāfunu, corresponding to present-day Diafunu. They counted among the Djanāwa, that is to say the blacks, and lived in the centre of the desert (probably the deserts and steppes of south-east Mauritania) and in areas in the vicinity of Ghana and Tadmekka (north of Gao), whose inhabitants invaded their lands in order to take slaves. They had their kings and wore animal skins, as was normal for a people partly composed of nomads. The Barbar believed themselves to be the noblest of the Sudanese peoples and claimed that the sovereigns of Ghana came from their ethnic group.

The Barbar would thus appear to be a group of the Soninke. Might not al-Barābir (Barbara, Barbar) be identified with a black people known as al-Barbar who, as local tradition has it, formerly inhabited the city of Tichitt in south-east Mauritania? Some observers identify this legendary people with a people of black-skinned agriculturalists referred to as the Barbaros in the ancient Portuguese chronicles and appearing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of the Christian era in the Mauritanian Adrār, alongside the 'Azenègues' or Berber Zenaga (Ṣanhādja).

12

The emergence of the Fāṭimids

The establishment of the Fāṭimid dynasty

At the end of the ninth century a large part of the Muslim West (the Maghrib and Spain) was already outside the effective political control of the Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad.¹

In religious terms the Maghrib was divided between the orthodoxy of Sunna, with Kayrawān as one of the strongholds of the Mālikite legal school, and the heterodoxy of various Khāridjite sects. Although the Idrīsids belonged to 'Alī's family and their establishment was preceded by Shī'ite propaganda, it seems that the doctrinal tenets of the Shī'a, as elaborated in the Orient, were not widely propagated and even less followed in their realm.

All this was changed with the coming to North Africa of a vigorous and extremely active form of the Shī'a, the Ismā'īliyya, at the end of the ninth century. The essential part of the Shī'ite creed is the dogma that the leadership (*imāmate*) of the Muslim community belongs rightly to the descendants of Muḥammad through his daughter Fāṭima and her husband 'Alī, the fourth Caliph.² The Shī'ites split into many groups on the question as to who should be the last visible and the first hidden *imām* (and thus the *Mahdī*). Those who consider the twelfth *imām*, Muḥammad, who disappeared in 878, as the hidden one are known as the Twelvers (*Ithnā-'ashariyya*) and form today the main body of the Shī'ites.

Another group diverged at this point, professing the *imāmate* of Ismā'īl (d. 760) in preference to his brother Musa, who was recognized by the majority of the sect. Ismā'īl (and later his son Muḥammad) thus became, in their eyes, the seventh and hidden *imām*; the sect took the name of Ismā'īliyya and its adherents are also known as the Seveners (*Sab'iyya*).

The history of this sect is rather obscure. As is often the case with dissident sects, the Ismā'īli movement split into several branches, with one of the main points of divergence concerning the nature of the *imāms*. The branch from which the Fāṭimids emerged accepted the doctrine claiming the existence of visible *imāms* at the head of the Muslim community. The official Fāṭimid version claims that the line of the

1. See Chapter 10 of this volume.

2. On other differences in dogma, see Chapter 2 of this volume.

Fāṭimid Caliphs was preceded by a series of 'hidden *imāms*' descended from Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl.

The Ismā'īlites organized one of the most subtle and effective political and religious propaganda campaigns. Their leaders began to send missionaries (*dā'ī*, pl. *du'āt*) to preach their doctrines, and primarily that of the early return of the hidden *imām* as the expected *Mahdī*. Ismā'īlism appealed to various social strata that were discontented with the established order, promising a new era of vague social justice and reform that would come with emergence of the *Mahdī*. In some regions, the missionaries succeeded in founding small states but nowhere did their propaganda achieve such success as in North Africa, and especially, in the first instance, among the Kutāma Berbers. Of all the Ismā'īli branches, only the Fāṭimids were able to found and maintain an empire that lasted for more than two centuries and came within reach of attaining the universal goal of the doctrine.

The Kutāma branch of the Berbers inhabited the region of Little Kabylia. Although they were never subjugated by the Aghlabids, the Kutāma were motivated by a profound aversion towards the Arab conquerors and rulers of Ifrīkiya.

At the end of the ninth century, the Aghlabids attempted to subjugate the Kutāma by occupying some fortified places on the approaches to the Kutāma independent zone. This threat was skilfully exploited by Ismā'īlite propaganda.

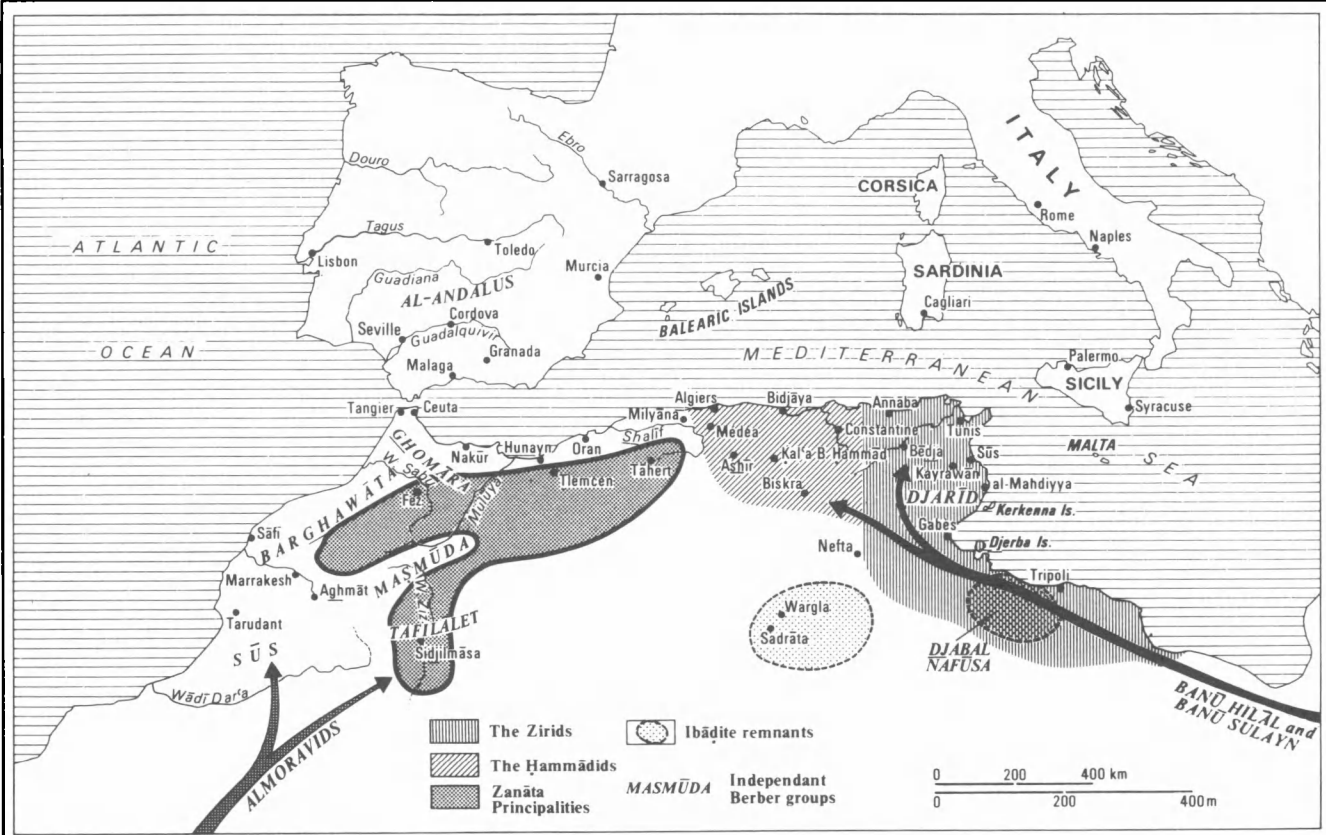
Of decisive importance were the activities of the *dā'ī* Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shi'ī, a native of Yemen, who was sent among the Kutāma towards the close of the ninth century.

It is not entirely clear what special appeal the Kutāma found in the Ismā'īlite Shī'ism preached by Abū 'Abd Allāh. It is difficult to discern any clear social character in the Fāṭimid branch of Ismā'īlism. In the Maghrib, they exploited the general discontent of the local population and, to some degree, Kutāma expansionism, but even those Berbers never assimilated their doctrines. Once in power in the Maghrib and later in Egypt, the Fāṭimids did not implement any social transformation. It was in the other branch of Ismā'īliyya, the Karmatians in Bahrayn and eastern Arabia, that the primitive social ideas of the movement stressing social justice and egalitarian ideals were incarnated. Nothing distinguished the Fāṭimid regime, in social terms, from all other Islamic regimes.

The majority of the Kutāma was soon won over by Abū 'Abd Allāh's propaganda to the cause of the descendants of 'Alī and Fāṭima then represented by the *Imām* 'Ubayd Allāh.

The decisive struggle against the Aghlabids started in 903, when the Kutāma troops descended from their mountains into the plains of Ifrīkiya. The Aghlabid armies were easily defeated and, within a few years, the greater part of Ifrīkiya was in the hands of Abū 'Abd Allāh; the sympathy of the people to his cause increased as a result of his fiscal policy, since he made it illegal to levy all non-canonical taxes and returned to the inhabitants of the conquered towns the booty taken from them by the Kutāma. After a prolonged campaign, Qayrawān, the capital of Ifrīkiya, was conquered by Abū 'Abd Allāh. Ziyādat Allāh left his residence in Raḥḥāda and fled to Egypt, and the Aghlabid period in North African history thus came to an end.

After the first successes of his followers in Ifrīkiya, *Imām* 'Ubayd Allāh, who until



12.1 The Maghrib in the first half of the fifth/eleventh century. (I. Hrbek)

then lived in Salamiyya in Syria, decided to move into the Maghrib. Instead of joining Abū 'Abd Allāh in Ifrīqiya, however, he went to Sidjilmāsa, the capital of the Khāridjite Midrārid state in southern Morocco. This is a curious episode and no conclusive answer as yet has been found to explain it. What was his purpose in going to the far west, among the worst enemies of the Shī'a, when there was already a large area under the control of his followers? Was his aim to establish a second centre in Sidjilmāsa and to lay hands on the flow of gold coming there from the Sudan? Whatever his original purpose, some time after his arrival he was put under house-arrest and was later thrown into prison by Yasā'ibn Midrār.

In 909, Abū 'Abd Allāh led the Kutāma army to Sidjilmāsa to free his master; in the course of that expedition and with the help of the local inhabitants, he overthrew the Rustumids in Tāhert. Sidjilmāsa capitulated without any fighting and 'Ubayd Allāh was set free. In the next year he triumphally entered Raqqāda, where he was proclaimed 'Prince of the faithful' (a Caliph title) and 'Mahdī'; according to the Ismā'īlite doctrine that meant the end of an age of tyranny and the beginning of a new 'golden' era.

The origin of 'Ubayd Allāh and thus of the Fāṭimids is still shrouded in obscurity. Muslim historians are divided into two camps on the question of the legitimacy of their claims. The enemies of the Fāṭimids denied their descent from 'Alī and Fāṭima and declared them impostors, but no support for their legitimacy is even to be found among such notable Sunnite historians as Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn Khaldūn and al-Maqrīzī. This is rather a complex problem and even modern scholarship has not found a satisfactory solution. What was most important, however, was that their immediate followers in North Africa firmly believed in their 'Alī descent.

'Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī (909–34) established himself first in Raqqāda, but shortly thereafter began to build a new capital, al-Mahdiyya, on the eastern coast, where he transferred his seat in 920. Later, after Abū Yazīd's revolt, the Caliph al-Manṣūr (946–53) again founded a new capital to the east of Qayrawān, at Ṣabra-Manṣūriyya, which was completed in 949.

The foundation of a Shī'ite state in North Africa sealed the break-up of the Muslim world into three mutually hostile empires: the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad, the Fāṭimid Caliphate in North Africa and the Umayyad emirate in Spain. Shortly afterwards, in 929, the Umayyad emir of Cordoba, 'Abd al-Rahmān III, confronted with the spectacle of two Caliphs – a heretic one in Tunisia and an orthodox one not far away in Baghdad – proclaimed his own Caliphate. Thereafter, there were for some time three Caliphs in Islam.

The struggle for hegemony in North Africa

While the overthrow of the Aghlabid dynasty and the occupation of Ifrīqiya proper were accomplished in a relatively short time, further Fāṭimid conquests in the Maghrib proved to be more difficult and time-consuming.

The new doctrine of Ismā'īli Shī'ism could not fail to bring trouble into a region already split between Mālikite Sunnism and Khāridjism. All these groups accepted the rule of the Fāṭimids only grudgingly and often manifested their opposition. The



12.2 Aerial view of the peninsula of Mahdiyya (in the 1970s). (Cliché KAHIA; photo provided by the Office de la topographie et de la cartographie, Tunis)

mainstay of Sunnite opposition was *Qayrawān*, the famous centre of Mālikite orthodoxy, whose great influence among the town people and rural population continued undiminished. Although these Sunnite groups never openly revolted, their passive resistance and the possibility of their joining forces with the more radical *Khāridjites* contributed to the difficulties of the dynasty.

From the very beginning, the Fātimids considered North Africa merely as a spring-board for further conquests towards the east in order to supplant the Abbasids and to fulfil their universalistic dreams. These grandiose projects force them to keep up powerful and expensive armed forces in the shape of both an army and a navy.

The establishment of a military bridgehead was at the beginning rather precarious, since the sole supporters of the dynasty were the *Kutāma* and some other branches of the *Šanhādja*. These tribal contingents, however, were inclined to revolt. When 'Ubayd Allāh had Abū 'Abd Allāh and his brother assassinated for reasons that are not quite clear, the *Kutāma* rose in revolt and proclaimed a new *Mahdī*, in the person of a child; the revolt was soon suppressed with much bloodshed. Although the *Kutāma* helped the dynasty in its conquest of the Maghrib and Egypt and played there a role that should not be underestimated, there are many other instances of their revolts, disloyalty and disturbances. Thus the founder of the dynasty was forced to look elsewhere for more trustworthy recruits for his army. He found them in various Slavonic peoples from the Balkan peninsula: the *Šaḳāliba* (sing. *Šaḳlabī*), as they were called by the Arabs, soon became the second – and more stable – pillar of the Fātimid military and even administrative system. These people of south Slavonic origin came to Ifrīqiya through various channels, either as slaves imported and sold by the Venetians or as captives from Arab raids on the coasts of the Adriatic Sea. In the Fātimid empire they performed a role similar to that of the Turkish slave-soldiers in the more eastern parts of the Islamic world and served not only as élite troops but as administrators, governors and courtiers, and were known for their military prowess as well as for their loyalty. Some of them attained the highest posts, like *Djawhar*, the future conqueror of Egypt and the founder of Cairo and the al-Azhar mosque and university.

On the other hand, the black Africans did not play the same role as later, during the Egyptian phase. However, they served as troops in the army being called *Zawālī* after the great slave market in Fezzān, which points to the Chad region as their country of origin.

Although the Fātimids are considered to be the first dynasty to establish the political unity of the whole of North Africa (Ifrīqiya and the Maghrib), a close look would show how tenuous their authority was westwards of Ifrīqiya proper. Many regions or towns subdued by the Fātimid armies were to be again and again reconquered by the local people, chiefs or emirs, who always took the first opportunity to liberate themselves from foreign domination.

Some regions in North Africa never came under the authority of the Fātimids. After *Tāher* had been taken, the last *Rustumid Imām* fled with his people to *Wargla*, where the *Ibādites* remained independent and even spread to the *Mzāb*. Similarly, the *Djabal Nafūsa*, an ancient stronghold of the *Ibādites*, was never conquered.

During the tenth century, the northern fringes of the Sahara remained in the hands of the *Zanāta*, who controlled the terminals of the caravan trade going to the Lake Chad

region and to Gao. The Fāṭimid Caliphs were never able to bring that part of the Maghrib under their domination; it was in the westernmost terminal, Sidjilmāsa, where they attempted to tap the influx of Sudanese gold so much needed for their grandiose conquest plans. The control of the western gold route, rather than the colonization of the whole Maghrib, seems to have been the chief aim of their North African policy.

Fāṭimid attempts to implement that policy were continuously thwarted by both local centrifugal forces and external foes. The traditional rivalry between the Ṣanhādja and the Zanāta Berbers, conditioned as they were by their different ways of life, commercial interests and religious allegiances, was soon integrated into a more grandiose duel fought in the tenth century between the Umayyads of Spain and the Fāṭimids of Ifrīkiya. Those two empires engaged in a struggle for hegemony through the intermediary of their Berber allies: whereas generally (there were some exceptions) the Zanāta, and particularly the Maghrāwa, represented the interests of the Caliphs of Cordoba, the Ṣanhādja groups, especially the Banū Zirī, stood firmly on the Fāṭimid side. As long as the Fāṭimid power base remained in Ifrīkiya (until the seventies of the tenth century), the Ṣanhādja-Fāṭimid alliance held the upper hand. During that period, their armies reached the western Maghrib at least twice, but they were not able to establish a lasting Fāṭimid control over those distant regions. And, when the Fāṭimid concentrated their forces on the attack of Egypt, the western Maghrib slipped away into the Umayyad orbit and was for ever lost to the Fāṭimids and their Zirīd vassals.

In the background of the Fāṭimid-Umayyad and Ṣanhādja-Zanāta struggle, there loomed from the very start the vision of Sudanese gold and of the control over the terminals of the caravan routes. Scholars are only now beginning to appreciate the implications of that factor for the history of North and West Africa, particularly for the interpretation of Fāṭimid history.

The discontent of large strata of the population with the fiscal and religious oppression of the Fāṭimids, although it grew steadily, did not take on dangerous proportions until the last years of al-Ḳā'im's reign. Then, in the year 943, there suddenly broke out a terrible revolt, or rather a genuine revolution, which came close to destroying the whole Fāṭimid state. Its leader was Abū Yazīd Maḳhlad ibn Kaydād, commonly known as Abū l-Ḥimār (the man on the donkey), who was born either at Tadmekka or at Gao (Kāw-Kāw) in the Sudan, the son of a Zanāti merchant from Bilād al-Djarīd and his black slave girl. Abū Yazīd excelled as a scholar and teacher of Ibādīte dogmatics and soon became one of the leading figures of the Nukkārīte branch, the most radical Ibādīte wing. When 'Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī established Shī'ite domination, Abū Yazīd started to preach a holy war against the Fāṭimids among the Berbers of the Awrās Mountains and the peasant masses of the plains. He received some support from the Spanish Umayyads and entered into a rather uneasy alliance with the orthodox Mālikite bourgeoisie in Ḳayrawān. Six months after the beginning of the open revolt, his army swept over the plains of Ifrīkiya, conquered Ḳayrawān (in 944) and defeated the Fāṭimid troops in several fierce battles. Thereafter, for ten months, Abū Yazīd laid siege to al-Mahdiyya, the last stronghold of Fāṭimid rule, which was defended by the Caliph al-Ḳā'im. Shī'ite domination in North Africa was on the brink of collapse.

Then came an anticlimax: Abū Yazīd's contingents of local levies started to disperse

and go home and not even the death of al-Ḳā'im in 946 could improve the deteriorating situation of the revolt.

The new Caliph al-Manṣūr soon undertook energetic steps to quell the uprising and during a six months' campaign he decisively defeated the Ḳhārīdījite army. Abū Yazīd continued the struggle in the Hodna Mountains but in 947 succumbed to the injuries he suffered in one of the skirmishes with the Fāṭimid troops.

Abū Yazīd's revolt was the greatest ever undertaken against the Fāṭimids and it almost succeeded in overthrowing their regime. Al-Manṣūr's victory over it heralded the beginning of a gradual decline of Ḳhārīdījite fortunes in North Africa. After the invasion of Banū Hilāl in the eleventh century, the decline was even accelerated; the most rigorous Ibādites withdrew to a few remote regions, while the majority of them were gradually converted to orthodox Sunni Islam.

Imperial policy: Sicily, the Mediterranean, Egypt

The Fāṭimids inherited from their predecessors, the Aghlabids, an interest in the island of Sicily, but their beginnings there were not auspicious, since two successive governors were driven out by the local inhabitants. Sicily reverted to the Fāṭimid domain in 916 but, in the next three decades, the island was the scene of many disturbances that almost amounted to civil war. It was only after the Caliph had sent al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Kalbī (d. 965) as governor in 948 that the situation improved and order was re-established. Under him and his successors, the Kalbite dynasty, Muslim Sicily became a prosperous province, while at the same time gaining more and more autonomy.

The Muslims in Sicily lightened somewhat the heavy burden of Byzantine taxation and enriched Sicilian agriculture with new techniques and crops. It was in this period that the cultivation of citrus fruits, sugar-cane, palms and mulberries all began. As for cotton, its cultivation continued for a long time and disappeared only in the fourteenth century.

Equally important was the bilateral staple trade with Ifrīḳiya, which sent oil in exchange for Sicilian grain and timber; this last commodity, whose shortage was notorious in other Islamic countries, enabled the Aghlabids and thereafter the Fāṭimids to build strong navies and emerge as leading maritime powers in the central Mediterranean. Sicily was also the main source of seasoned sailors for manning the Fāṭimid (and later the Zirīd) fleets.

Control over Sicily gave the Fāṭimids strategic preponderance in the Mediterranean and Palermo became an important naval base. Nearly every year the Fāṭimid fleet raided the shores of the Adriatic Sea, the Tyrrhenian coast and southern Italy (chiefly Taranto and Otranto); it also harassed the southern coast of France, took Genoa and coasted along Calabria, carrying off slaves and other booty.

The maritime domination of the Fāṭimids in the Mediterranean was so great that, some centuries later, Ibn Ḳhaldūn nostalgically noted that 'the Christians were unable to let float on the sea even a board'.

The imperial idea was inherent in the Ismā'īli ideology, of which the Fāṭimids were the most prominent champions; among all the Ismā'īli Shī'a branches, only they came within reach of attaining the ecumenical goal of their doctrine. They considered their

North African kingdom merely a preparatory stage, a necessary power base on the road to the creation of a universal Ismā'īli empire. Only domination over the heartland of Islam, i.e. the region from Egypt to Iran inclusively, could bring this project of universal empire nearer to realization, not the rule over peripheral Ifrīqiya and the Maghrib. Nevertheless, the Caliphs were realistic enough to see that, for the time being, this region had to form their economic and strategic base. And it was, indeed, the resources of North Africa – both human and material – that enabled the dynasty to set out on the victorious march to the East.

Soon after establishing his rule in Ifrīqiya, 'Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī considered – rather prematurely – that the time for the conquest of Egypt had arrived. However, three expeditions undertaken in the course of the first quarter of the tenth century were unsuccessful. These repeated failures were due mainly to the insufficient resources of the dynasty in its early stages. It took nearly a half-century before the economic, military and political situation of the Fāṭimid state improved to such a degree as to make a new attempt to conquer Egypt successfully. In the mean time, Ifrīqiya with its direct dependencies (Sicily, parts of Algeria and Libya) went through a period when it flourished as never before, due partly to its role as one of the main Mediterranean trade entrepôts and partly to its control over the gold imports from the Sudan. Last but not least, the Fāṭimids were able to establish a very efficient centralized administration, which assured the smooth functioning of supply services for their armed forces.

These achievements allowed the fourth Caliph, al-Mu'izz, to prepare and launch the final attack on Egypt. The conquest, which was carefully planned and helped by skilful political propaganda, was achieved without much difficulty by Ḍjawhar, who entered al-Fuṣṭāṭ on 1 July 969. Shortly after the conquest of al-Fuṣṭāṭ, Ḍjawhar started to build a new capital, Cairo – in Arabic, al-Ḳāhira – and in the next year laid the foundations of the al-Azhar mosque. Four years after the conquest, in 973, al-Mu'izz moved from Ifrīqiya to Cairo, making Egypt the centre of an empire that survived its original founders and lasted for more than five centuries.³ This shift of the Fāṭimid centre to the east had profound and manifold consequences for the history of North Africa.

The return to Berber hegemony: the Zīrīds

In the heavy fighting against Abū Yazīd's revolt, the Talkata, a branch of the Ṣanhādja led by a Zīrī ibn Manād, had proved their loyalty to the Fāṭimid cause. In recognition of this, the Caliph had given Zīrī, after the defeat of Abū Yazīd, command over all Ṣanhādja and their territory. During the remaining Fāṭimid period in the Maghrib, Zīrī and his son Buluḳḳīn led many victorious campaigns against the Zanāta and the Maghrāwa in the central and western Maghrib.

It was thus only natural that the Caliph, before leaving permanently for Egypt in 972, should have appointed Buluḳḳīn ibn Zīrī as his lieutenant over all the western part of the empire. This event ushered in a new epoch in North African history. Until the coming of the Zīrīds, all the main dynasties – the Idrīsids, the Rustumids, the

3. For the history of the Fāṭimids in Egypt, see Chapter 9 of this volume and Chapter 15 of Volume IV.

Aghlabids and the Fāṭimids – were of eastern origin. The Zīrīds were the first reigning house of Berber origin; moreover, they opened the period of Maghribian history when the political power in the region was held exclusively by Berber dynasties (the Almoravids, the Almohads, the Zayyanids, the Marinids and the Ḥafṣīds).

Under the first three Zīrīds – Buluḳḳīn (972–84), al-Manṣūr (984–96) and Bādīs (996–1016) – relations with the Fāṭimids generally remained correct. The tribute to Cairo was paid regularly and the emirs occasionally sent precious gifts to the Caliphs, who nevertheless surrounded the emirs with their representatives as controllers. At the same time, the Zīrīds tried to acquire more real independence without renouncing the *de jure* suzerainty of the Fāṭimids. It seems that the Fāṭimids, as they became more and more absorbed by their eastern politics, were gradually losing interest in the western parts of the empire; whether this was caused by the economic decline of Ifrīḳiya or the inability to intervene there militarily, or by a combination of the two, is difficult to decide.

The first two Zīrīds, Buluḳḳīn and al-Manṣūr, continued a vigorous offensive against the Zanāta and their Umayyad protectors in the west, but without any lasting effect. Al-Manṣūr, realizing that the total occupation of the western Maghrib, with its turbulent population, was beyond his powers, renounced the offensive and turned his attention more to the consolidation of the central province, Ifrīḳiya.

The reign of Bādīs witnessed a number of far-reaching changes which left their mark on the political map of the Maghrib. The first was the offensive of the Zanāta (principally the Maghrāwa), who attacked the central Maghrib in 998–9 and reached as far as Tripoli. At the same time, the Zanāta groups living on Zīrīd territory revolted; the situation was saved by the military prowess of Ḥammād ibn Buluḳḳīn, an uncle of Bādīs, who pacified the central Maghrib and repulsed the Zanāta to Morocco. Bādīs was forced to give his uncle large fiefs in the central Maghrib, where Ḥammād founded in 1007–8 his own capital, the fortress Kal'a Banū Ḥammād, one of the most imposing architectural monuments in North Africa. In a short time Ḥammad proclaimed his independence (in 1015), severing relations with the Fāṭimids and transferring his allegiance to the Abbasids. Thus the Ṣanhādja dynasty split into two – the Zīrīds, who retained Ifrīḳiya proper, and the Ḥammādīds, who ruled over the central Maghrib. Although Bādīs and, after his death, his successor al-Mu'izz (1016–62) defeated Ḥammād in the end, they were forced to recognize the independence of the latter; an uneasy peace followed between the two branches.

The majority of the population in Ifrīḳiya and the central Maghrib always stood in opposition to the Ismā'īli Shī'a, the official religion of the Fāṭimids and the Zīrīds, but this opposition was rather passive. In the last year of Bādīs' reign, however, the first massacres of the Shī'ites took place. This movement, which expressed the feelings of both the urban and rural masses, clearly showed al-Mu'izz the dangers of a sectarian government imposed upon a generally orthodox, Sunni population. This does not mean that the religious question played the most important part in the rupture between the Zīrīds and Fāṭimids which occurred in the middle of the eleventh century, but it certainly was a contributing factor in the decision of al-Mu'izz to throw off his allegiance to the Fāṭimids in Cairo and to return to orthodoxy.

The unity of the Maghrib, which the Fāṭimids sought but never permanently

achieved, did not survive their withdrawal to the east. The fissiparous tendencies of the Berbers and their opposition to political centralization proved stronger than the feeble attempts of the Zīrīds to continue the unifying policies of their suzerains. In the first half of the eleventh century, the political map of the Maghrib offered the following picture:

- (1) To the east, in Ifrīqiya, the Zīrīd realm constituted the most advanced and relatively stable state.
- (2) To the west of the Zīrīd emirate, the Hammādids established their independent state, which permanently fought with the Zanāta and occasionally with the Zīrīds.
- (3) After the withdrawal of the Fāṭimids and the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate in Spain, various groups of the Zanāta seized the opportunity to found a number of independent statelets, in Tlemcen, Sidjilmāsa, Fez and elsewhere. They never formed any centralized political organization but rather linguistic and ethnic groups united only by their hostility to the Ṣanhādja.
- (4) On the Atlantic coast, the heretical Barghawāta were able to preserve their independence against the attacks of the Zīrīds and later of the Zanāta.
- (5) The Ghomāra held a similar position in northern Morocco, strengthening their independence even more after the decline of the Umayyads.
- (6) The numerous Masmūda groups in southern Morocco, the Anti-Atlas and the Sūs continued their independent existence as small communities without any higher organization.

In general, the situation of the Berbers resembled that obtaining before the Arab conquest; the Arab element was represented only in towns and its strength diminished gradually from east to west. Parallel with it also went the political structure: in Ifrīqiya, the state system was most developed, while in the western parts of the Maghrib the societies had not yet reached the level of state formation.

The religious situation underwent far-reaching changes in the post-Fāṭimid period: by the mid-eleventh century the whole Maghrib could be seen as an orthodox Sunnite region with no traces of Shī'ism and with only a few minor enclaves of Khāridjism. This change may be explained as being the direct consequence of the return of political supremacy to the Berbers. Under these conditions Khāridjism had lost its *raison d'être* as an ideology of Berber resistance against the Arab conquerors and dynasties professing the Sunnite form of Islam. It is also part of the irony of history that the Fāṭimids, one of the most successful and powerful Shī'ite dynasties, had – by inflicting heavy defeats and losses on North African Khāridjism – paved the way for the definitive victory of Sunnite Mālikism in the eastern and central Maghrib.

The Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaym invasion

When the Zīrīd al-Mu'izz ibn Bādīs had at last, in 1047, broken with his Fāṭimid suzerain al-Mustaṣfir and recognized the Abbasid Caliph of Baghdad, thus abandoning the Shī'ite creed for the Sunnite one, the revenge of the Fāṭimids took a peculiar form. Owing to the impossibility of sending an army against the recalcitrant vassal, the vizier

al-Yazūrī advised his master to punish the Ṣanhādja by handing over Ifrīqiya to the horde of nomadic Arabs of Banū Hilāl and Banū Ṣalaym, who lived at that time in Upper Egypt.

To persuade the chiefs of both tribes to undertake the westward migration was apparently not too difficult, as it held out the promise of rich booty and better pastures than those in Upper Egypt.

The Arabs started to migrate in 1050–1 and in the first stage ravaged the province of Barqa; the Banū Hilāl then moved further to the west, leaving Barqa to the Banū Sulaym, who remained there for some decades before moving on again. When the vanguard of the Banū Hilāl appeared in southern Tunisia, al-Mu'izz did not immediately recognize what a scourge was nearing his domain. He tried to enlist the invaders into his service as potential allies: at his invitation, the majority of the Banū Hilāl left Barqa and soon their hordes had overrun the southern parts of the Zīrīd emirate. The ever increasing pillaging of villages and towns dashed the hopes of al-Mu'izz of making the nomads the mainstay of his armed forces. He tried to stop their incursions but, in several battles, among which that of Ḥaydarān in the region of Gabès (in 1051–2) became the most famous, his army was utterly routed. The countryside, important villages and even some towns fell into the hands of the nomadic chiefs and anarchy and insecurity spread still further. In 1057, al-Mu'izz was forced to abandon Ḥayrawān and take refuge in al-Mahdiyya, which became the capital of his now much reduced state. Immediately afterwards, Ḥayrawān was sacked by the Banū Hilāl, a disaster from which it never recovered.

When the Arabs invaded the central Maghrib, the Ḥammādid of Ḥal'a tried to reap advantage from the troubles of their Zīrīd cousins. In 1065 the Hammādid al-Nāṣir, at the head of a large coalition of Berbers and Banū Hilāl (Ṣanhādja, Zanāta and the Hilālī sections of Athbadj and 'Adī) fought against other Arab sections (Riyāh, Zughba and Banū Sulaym) and suffered a heavy defeat at Sabība. The grip of Banū Hilāl became gradually so strong that al-Nāṣir had to abandon his capital, the Ḥal'a, for Bidjāya (Bougie) and to leave the southern parts of his domain to the nomads. Bidjāya became the new capital of the Ḥammādid dynasty. In the mean time the nomadic Arabs occupied large parts of Ifrīqiya and the central Maghrib, founding numerous independent principalities, which engaged in incessant warring among themselves and against the remnants of the Zīrīd and Ḥammādid states, thereby increasing the general anarchy and decline of economic life. It was not until the middle of the twelfth century that order was restored by the arrival of the Almohads.

Ibn Ḳhaldūn was the first chronicler to stress the destructive role of the Bedouins, comparing them to 'a cloud of hungry locusts'. Modern historians have generally taken the same view and have pointed out the various adverse consequences which 'the Hilālīan catastrophe' had for North African history.

In recent years an attempt to revise the hypothesis of 'the Hilālīan catastrophe' has been undertaken; it is now maintained that the Arab nomads were not so numerous and their invasion not so destructive, and that, before their arrival, signs of economic decline had already appeared in North African society. The polemic has cleared up many points and has, to some degree, rectified the one-sided view of the Hilālīans as the chief and sole culprits of the eventual decline.

It cannot be denied, however, that the arrival of a considerable body of nomadic Arabs represented a turning-point in North African history from many points of view. Although the process of Arabization was already well advanced, at least in Ifrīqiya, large parts of the countryside remained inhabited and cultivated by Berber-speaking populations. Whereas the Arabs of the first conquest in the eighth century had been absorbed in the Berber population, the Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaym set in motion a reverse process. Some Zanāta groups – particularly the Banū Marīn – were forced to retreat westwards to make room for the Arabs. Although the Arabs penetrated neither the littoral regions nor the mountain massifs, which became the refuge of the sedentary Berbers, the plains of the eastern half of the Maghrib gradually fell under their influence.

As for the harm done by their arrival, it is generally agreed to have been extensive, even if the term ‘catastrophe’ seems to be rather exaggerated. There is no doubt that the presence of thousands of nomads with their herds must have had considerable consequences for the economic life of the country. The former equilibrium between the nomadic and sedentary elements in North Africa was thus disturbed, with the result that many parts of the fertile land were abandoned by agriculturalists and left to the Bedouins.

Although the anarchy that was a natural consequence of the collapse of the Zīrīd and later Ḥammādid states might not have been as widespread as that described by Ibn Khaldūn, security generally suffered from the presence of too many independent and unruly Arab groups. The decline of towns in the interior was comparatively rapid, and, while Kayrawān was destined to lose much of its former importance, the Ḳal‘a of Banī Ḥammād gradually ceased to exist.

The principal casualties of the unrest were the Zīrīd and Ḥammādid emirates, which survived only in the coastal strips around al-Mahdiyya and Bidjāya (Bougie). The progress of the Arab nomads in the interior contributed to the seaward movement of the Ṣanhādja Berbers and it even accentuated the dichotomy between the inland regions and the littoral. On the ruins of the Zīrīd and Ḥammādid states, piracy prospered. Bidjāya, better situated than al-Mahdiyya, which lacked timber for ship-building, became an important maritime centre and entered into brisk trade with other parts of the Mediterranean, chiefly with the Italian towns. The Ḥammādidids were able, at the beginning of the twelfth century, to conquer and dominate the island of Djerba.

The economy of North Africa as it had previously existed had been seriously undermined. The pre-eminently sedentary and agricultural economy of the eastern Maghrib gradually gave way to an economy with a preponderance of nomadic and pastoral features.

These profound changes in the eastern part, moreover, took place at the same time as the western regions of the Maghrib were coming under the impact of another group of nomads – the Almoravids. Both events inaugurated a new chapter in the history of the Maghrib.

At much the same time as the Banū Hilāl and the Banū Sulaym began to penetrate North Africa from the east,¹ there started at the opposite end of the Maghrib a movement of the desert Berbers, who, in a short time, were to invade the western and central part of the region. Both these simultaneous movements were expressions of nomadic dynamism and both led to the temporary control of the nomads over sedentary societies and established state organizations.

The political, economic and religious background to the Almoravid movement

In the first half of the eleventh century, the region of Morocco and the area south of it as far as the Senegal river were inhabited by the Berbers, who were splintered into many hostile and warring factions. Morocco itself had for the preceding century been the object of the struggle between the two great western powers – the Spanish Umayyads and the Fāṭimids. In general, the Umayyads were represented by the Zanāta group, whereas the Fāṭimids entrusted this task to the Ṣanhādja Zīrīds as their lieutenants. One of the principal aims of this struggle was to exercise control over the trade routes to the western Sudan and/or over the gold trade. Various Zanāta principalities in Morocco, which were fighting not only against the Zīrīds but often also among themselves, gradually extended their domination from Fez to Sidjilmāsa, Aghmāt, Tāmdūlt and part of Wādī Dar'a, which were, until then, under the control of the Saharan Ṣanhādja. The continuous fighting and general anarchy made life and normal economic activities under the Zanāta regime unbearable.

A similar situation of anarchy existed to the south of Morocco among the 'veiled' (*mulaththamun*) Saharan Ṣanhādja. These nomadic Ṣanhādja were composed of three main branches: the Massūfa in the north and east (in Wādī Dar'a, Ḥawḍ and Taghāza), the Lamtūna in the centre and south (in Adrār and Tāgant) and the Djuddāla (or Guddāla) to the west, in the Atlantic Sahara. Until the beginning of the tenth century, the Berbers of the western Sahara were known as the Anbiya and it still

1. See Chapter 12 of this volume.

remains uncertain whether that was the designation of a loose confederacy of the three main branches or whether it was another name for one of them.²

During the tenth century, there were attempts to unify the *Ṣanhādja*, perhaps in order to ensure better control over the trade routes or for the purpose of conquest in the Sudan, but these were followed by a lengthy period of disunity, confusion and anarchy. No single confederation was able to retain supremacy in the desert and its leadership changed frequently.

This state of affairs among the *Ṣanhādja* groups did not remain without effect on their economic prosperity. Although nomadic pastoralism formed the way of life of the majority of the desert *Ṣanhādja*, participation in the caravan trade between the Maghrib and the Sudan transiting across the territory represented a welcome addition to their income.

Until the third quarter of the tenth century, the *Ṣanhādja* confederacy controlled the very important salt-mines at *Awlīl* and held the monopoly of the salt trade going through *Awdāghust* to Ghana. Although the town of *Awdāghust* had not yet reached its zenith, it was nevertheless an important commercial centre dominated by a *Ṣanhādja* chief and inhabited by a *Ṣanhādja* majority. After 970, however, the trade of *Awdāghust* began to be dominated by the *Zanāta* and Arab traders of *Ifrikiya* and the *Ṣanhādja* were almost completely excluded from it.

The weakening of the *Ṣanhādja* had also allowed the *Maghrāwa* Berbers of *Sidjilmāsa* to gain control and occupy large areas of pastureland in the *Dar'a*, *Aghmāt* and *Tāmdūlt*, and these were vital to the nomadic economy of the northern *Ṣanhādja* groups.

Thus, in the first half of the eleventh century, the *Ṣanhādja* of the western Sahara lost much of their former preponderance in both the north and south, where their hereditary enemies, the *Zanāta* Berbers, took over not only the termini of the trans-Saharan routes (*Sidjilmāsa* and *Awdāghust*) but also their best grazing.

Turning now to the religious conditions prevailing in the westernmost part of the Islamic world just before the rise of the Almoravids, we find not only a variety of heterodox sects but also varying degrees of Islamization, ranging from a very superficial knowledge of the main tenets of the religion among the desert and mountain Berber groups to highly developed Islamic institutions in some towns and regions.

Among the heterodox sects, the most interesting was that of the *Barghawāta*, a Berber group living on the Atlantic plains of Morocco between *Salé* and *Sāfi*.³ In the southern parts of Morocco, in the *Sūs* region, the Atlas mountains and the *Dar'a* valley, lived groups of *Shī'ites* of various denominations. But the most important non-orthodox sect among the Berbers were the *Khāridjites*, and especially the *'Ibādites*.⁴ Although, after the advent of the *Fātimids* and the unsuccessful revolt of *Abū Yazīd* in *Ifrikiya*, the political role of the *Khāridjites* in the Mediterranean Maghrib diminished, they still retained strong positions and influence in the Sahara and the Sudan, especially as traders and missionaries.

2. See Chapter 11 of this volume.

3. See Chapters 3 and 10 of this volume.

4. See Chapters 10, 11 and 12 of this volume.

All the early Arabic sources about the rise of the Almoravid movement are unanimous in stressing the superficial Islamization of the Saharan people and their religious ignorance and negligence. There were, of course, among the chiefs and leaders some persons with a deeper knowledge of Islam, who had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, and even some *faḳīhs*, who endeavoured to improve the religious situation of their compatriots.

The first half of the eleventh century witnessed a revival of orthodox Sunni Islam in the Muslim world from the Maghrib in the west to Iran in the east. It emerged partly as a vigorous reaction against the Shī'ite dynasties like the Fāṭimids and Buwayhids under whose domination a large part of Muslim countries then lived. Outstanding in the ideological struggle against the Shī'a and other heterodoxies were the Mālikite *faḳīhs* of North Africa, especially those from the ancient Mālikite stronghold of Ḳayrawān.

The beginnings of Ibn Yāsīn's reforming activities

The generally accepted story about the beginnings of the Almoravid movement tells of Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm, one of the leaders of the Djuddāla Berbers from the western Sahara, who, on his way back from the pilgrimage to Mecca, asked Abū 'Imrān al-Fāsī (d. 1039), a famous Mālikite jurist of Ḳayrawān, to send somebody with him to instruct his people in the authentic Islamic religion, since they were rather ignorant in it. Since Abū 'Imrān could not find anybody in Ḳayrawān willing to go and live among the savage Ṣanhādja in the desert, he advised Yaḥyā to visit one of his former students, Waggāg ibn Zallū al-Lamtī, in Malkus near Sidjilmāsa, and obtain help from him. Waggāg then recommended his pupil 'Abdallāh ibn Yāsīn as the most promising missionary.

Not much is known about 'Abdallāh b. Yāsīn's life before he was sent to the desert Ṣanhādja. He came from the Djazūla, a Berber group in southern Morocco, his mother having originated from the village of Tamāmānāwt on the fringes of the desert bordering with Ghana. Some later sources indicate that he had studied for seven years in Muslim Spain but the almost contemporary al-Bakrī expresses grave doubts about the extent of Ibn Yāsīn's knowledge of the Qoran and Islamic law.

The history of Ibn Yāsīn's reforming activities among the Ṣanhādja is known only in general terms, since the chronology is uncertain and confused. In his activity in the desert we can discern two phases: in the first he tried to improve or reform the faith among the Djuddāla and succeeded in grouping around himself a number of followers. This phase lasted from about 1039 to 1053 and ended with a violent clash between the reformer and the Djuddāla leaders, with the result that Ibn Yāsīn was expelled. In the second phase, which lasted until his death in 1059, the Lamtūna became the mainstay of the Almoravid movement. From the first period, only two events are recorded: an attack against the Lamtūna, who were defeated in their mountains (Adrār), and the foundation of the town of Arat-n-anna where, in accordance with Ibn Yāsīn's egalitarian ideas, all houses were to have the same height.

After more than ten years of residence among the Djuddāla, Ibn Yāsīn clashed with a local *faḳīh* and two Djuddāla nobles. The cause of this split appears to have been a

combination of religious differences and a struggle for power after the death of Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm al-Djuddālī.

Ibn Yāsīn's strict demands for discipline and the observation of all religious duties as well as his puritanical and egalitarian ideas probably did not find the resonance he expected; being rather a harsh master, he displayed a disregard for the social values and taboos common to Ṣanhādja society. This episode shows that Ibn Yāsīn's means of power were rather limited and did not allow him to enforce his will.

It was among the Lamtūna led by Yaḥyā ibn 'Umar that Ibn Yāsīn found the necessary political support for the implementation of his aims. This was the turning-point in the history of the Almoravid movement and the main reason for the dominance of the Lamtūna. All this happened before 1055 and at that time there appears to have been serious tension between the Djuddāla and Lamtūna, probably caused by diverging policy as to the future orientation of the movement.

The transformation of a reform movement into a djihād

The dominance of the Lamtūna in the movement accounts for their having very often been identified as the Almoravids *par excellence*. Before we continue the history of the movement, however, we should discuss the problem of the origin of the name Almoravids (Arab. *al-Murābiṭūn*).

Until recently it was held that the word is derived from *ribāṭ* (*al-Murābiṭūn* = people of the *ribāṭ* or *rābiṭa*) – whose accepted sense is 'a fortified frontier or coastal post' or 'a fortified centre for religious and ascetic practice'. According to Ibn Abī Zar' (d. after 1326), Ibn Yāsīn withdrew after the disagreement with the Djuddāla to an island where he had built a *rābiṭa* with seven companions; later, he indoctrinated many other disciples and called them *al-Murābiṭūn* because of their adhesion to that *rābiṭa*. However, none of the more ancient sources refer to the existence of such a building and, as rightly stated by P. de Moraes Farias, 'one wonders why the account given by Ibn Abī Zar' has been accepted without challenge by most historians'.

Recent scholarship has finally abandoned the idea of *al-Murābiṭūn* = people of the *ribāṭ*. The name seems to be derived from the Qoranic meaning of the root *r-b-ṭ*, which is very close to that of waging *djihād*, and hence *ribāṭ* could also delineate the whole corpus of Islamic teaching laid down for the Ṣanhādja by Ibn Yāsīn. It is not altogether ruled out that the name *al-Murābiṭūn* is in some way connected with Waggāg's *Dār al-murābiṭūn*, where Ibn Yāsīn lived before his mission.

Final proof that there was no *ribāṭ* (a fortified outpost) on an island was adduced from the archaeological expedition of IFAN (Institut fondamental de l'Afrique noire) on the island of Tidra near the Mauritanian coast in 1966, where no vestiges of any *ribāṭ* could be found.

Ibn Yāsīn's retreat to this island is difficult to date exactly, but it probably occurred before 1052–3. When Ibn Yāsīn emerged from the retreat and found in the Lamtūna, especially among their chiefly family, represented by Yaḥyā ibn 'Umar and his brother Abū Bakr, his most devoted supporters, the movement entered a decisive phase: from a reform movement, it became a militant one whose members were ready to spread the teaching of the founder among other Ṣanhādja and even beyond, either by

persuasion or by *djihād*. Although Ibn Yāsīn wanted from the start to give his movement a supratribal character, the *al-Murābiṭūn* were and remained members of specific Berber groups. The leadership was in the hands of the Lamtūna under their chief Yaḥyā ibn 'Umar, to whom Ibn Yāsīn delegated the military command as *amīr*, while the other founding branches, the Massūfa and *Djuddāla* (at least at the beginning) followed this general command.

The unification of the Ṣanhādja was not an easy task; the *Djuddāla*, who were coerced into rejoining the movement, remained hostile and seceded at the earliest opportunity. When the main Almoravid army fought in southern Morocco, the *Djuddāla* revolted and Yaḥyā ibn 'Umar was sent against them, but was killed in 1056 at the battle of Tabfārillā, where his army, although reinforced by the troops of Labī ibn Wār-Dyābī, the chief of Takrūr, was defeated. On the other hand, the *Djuddāla* participated later in the Almoravid campaign in the Maghrib and were counted among the true Almoravids. More obscure were the relations with the Massūfa: according to Ibn *Khaldūn*, there was a conflict between them and the Lamtūna, but it seems that it was quickly settled and the Massūfa and Lamtūna formed a firm alliance in subsequent exploits. As for other Berbers, the Lamṭa were subdued at an early stage and rallied to the Almoravid cause, as did even some Zanāta and Masmūda.

Despite all the internal dissensions and secessionist tendencies, the new politico-religious system and common interests brought unity to the Ṣanhādja Berbers. Those who lived along the trade routes were interested in regaining control over them and the trade involved. The associated tribes in the north, the Lamṭa and the *Djazūla*, as well as some of the Lamtūna, wanted to regain the rich pastures between the Atlas mountains and the Sahara. The common enemy in both cases were the Zanāta. Although not all the Zanāta professed the *Khārīdijite* faith, many of them did and their heresy added another reason for the Mālikite Almoravids to attack them. Of no little importance to their initial successes were the virtually anarchic conditions prevailing in Morocco under the Maghrāwa dynasties, and many people greeted the conquering Almoravids as liberators from the Maghrāwa oppression. Over a period of five years, between 1054 and 1059, the Almoravids had broken the Zanāta supremacy in North-west Africa. The first campaigns were directed against the Zanāta domains in the Dar'ā valley and then against *Sidjilmāsa*. Having seized the northern terminus of the caravan trade, the Almoravid army immediately returned to the south against *Awdāghust*. After its conquest, they pitilessly massacred its Zanāta inhabitants. Thus the second terminus of the trans-Saharan route fell under their authority and, with it, control of the western trade as well.

In the next few years Ibn Yāsīn proved to be not only a religious reformer and fierce warrior, but also an accomplished politician. Through a fine diplomacy, he had secured the peaceful submission of the Maṣmūda Berbers of the Atlas mountains and likewise, after prolonged bargaining, the important town of Aghmāt, together with the entire Sūs region, fell under his control (in 1058). It goes without saying that all the various heresies and heterodoxies flourishing in this part of Morocco were extirpated and the Mālikite school in its Almoravid form introduced everywhere.

However, in their struggle against the most formidable foe of orthodoxy, the *Barghawāta*, the Almoravids suffered their first serious setback; in 1059 they were

defeated and Ibn Yāsīn was killed under obscure circumstances in the battle near Kurīfālat. His successor at the head of the Almoravid community became Abū Bakr ibn 'Umar.

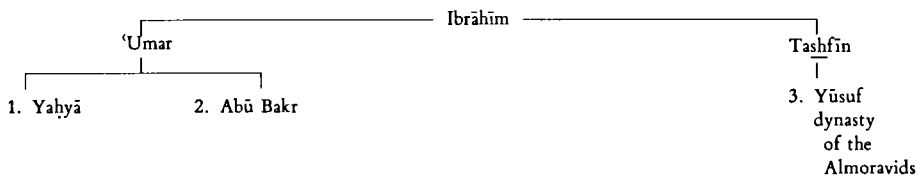
Although the founder's death led to a temporary crisis, it speaks for the solidity of Ibn Yāsīn's achievement that the whole movement did not crumble but, after a short time, found a new and even greater vigour that enabled it to continue victoriously both the spread of the new doctrine and the conquests.

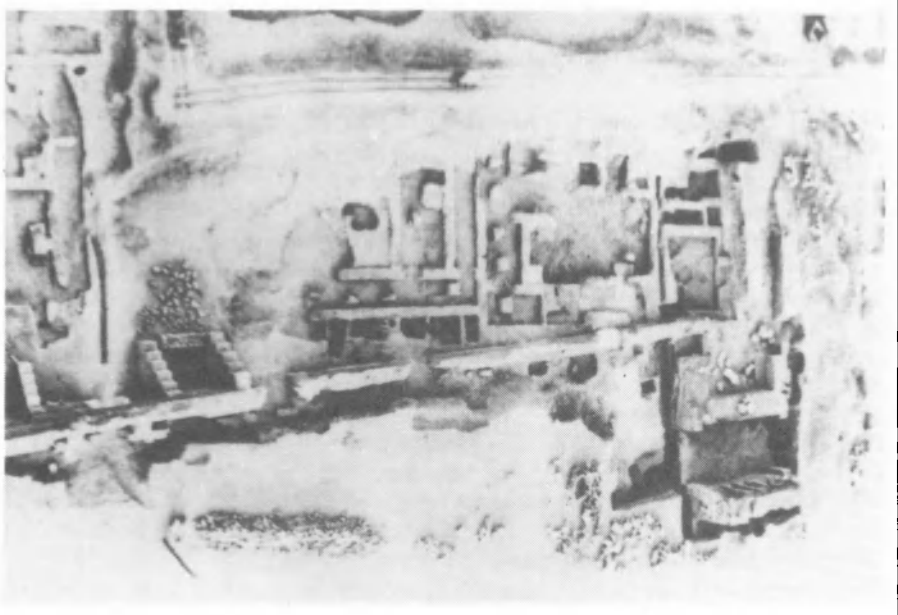
With the passing away of Ibn Yāsīn, the religious community transformed itself into a kingdom. As the spiritual leadership began to lose its former importance, the office of *amīr* achieved the primacy and the incumbent founded a dynasty. At the same time, a hierarchy developed: the first in the realm were the Lamtūna, the branch of the rulers, so that the Almoravids were often designated as *al-Lamtūniyyūn al-murābiṭūn* or more simply *Lamtūna*. The title *al-murābiṭ* was restricted to the members of the three founding branches.

The 'veiled ones' (*al-mulaththamūn*) is another name given to the Almoravids and is derived from the traditional custom of the desert Ṣanhādja to wear a mouth veil. In Muslim Spain the veil was considered a privilege of the true Almoravids and all but the Ṣanhādja were forbidden to wear it. It was something in the nature of the uniform or distinctive dress of the ruling class.

With the foundation of Marrakesh as the new capital to the north of the Atlas mountains in 1070, a new chapter began in Almoravid history. At the same time, there was also a split in the Almoravid movement into two wings, the southern led by Abū Bakr and the northern with Abū Bakr's cousin Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn at its head.⁵ When Abū Bakr was called back to the desert, where serious conflicts between the Lamtūna and the Massūfa threatened the unity of the movement, Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn became his deputy in the north and was entrusted with the task of continuing the campaign against the Zanāta. After settling the dispute in the Sahara, Abū Bakr returned to the north to assume again the leadership of the whole movement. In the mean time, however, Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn consolidated his position and naturally enough was not prepared to yield it to his cousin, although he still acknowledged him as his superior. For various reasons, Abū Bakr did not want to press his claim and gracefully handed over authority to Yūsuf. He then returned permanently to the Sahara. Nevertheless, he was recognized as the head of the whole Almoravid empire until his death in 1087. The golden Almoravid dinars were struck up to that day in his name and even Yūsuf b. Tāshfīn continued to pay him nominal allegiance.

5. The relationship of the first Almoravid *amīr*s is shown in the following (simplified) genealogy:





13.1 Marrakesh: excavations of the first Almoravid palace. (J. Terrasse)

The conquest in the north

In the years between 1075 and 1083, the Almoravid army led by Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn had gradually conquered Morocco and the western regions of Algeria. With the conquest of Ceuta, the Almoravid army secured control of the Straits of Gibraltar and this brought Muslim Spain into the sights of the desert warriors.

In Spain itself, no fewer than twenty petty states had arisen on the ruins of the once flourishing Umayyad Caliphate; these statelets, known collectively as *mulūk al-ṭawā'if* ('party kings'; in Spanish, *reyes de taifas*) were unable to resist the vigorous attempts of the northern Christian states to subdue them. After the Castilians conquered Toledo (Arab. Ṭulayṭula) in 1085, the danger of the total absorption of all the Muslim states on the Peninsula became apparent and only help from abroad was capable of halting the Christian advance. The sole power able to accomplish this task lay with the Almoravids. At the invitation of the Abbadid ruler of Seville, al-Mu'tamid, the Almoravid army under Yūsuf b. Tāshfīn crossed the Straits of Gibraltar in 1086 and inflicted on the Castilian army under King Alfonso VI a spectacular defeat at al-Andalus and Yūsuf returned to Morocco in accordance with his previous promise.

However, soon after his retreat, further discord among the petty rulers enabled the Christians to launch their attack again. The Almoravids were called to intervene afresh and in 1088 they scored another victory in the battle of Aledo. Even so, the *mulūk al-ṭawā'if* displayed open hostility towards their deliverers, whom they

feared no less than their Christian foes, and Ibn Tāshfīn left al-Andalus for the second time.

His patience was now exhausted and in 1090 he came back, but this time as conqueror rather than ally. Armed with *fatwās* (legal opinions), signed by numerous Moroccan and Andalusian *fuḳahā'*, he led the campaign against the *mulūk al-ṭawā'if*, who were accused of various anti-Islamic sins such as collaboration with the Christians, corruption, illegal taxation, etc. By 1094 the whole of Muslim Spain was annexed, with the exception of Toledo, which remained in Christian hands, and Saragossa, where the dynasty of Banū Hūd was allowed to continue in power and form a buffer state. All Muslim rulers were deposed and the unity of Muslim Spain – now under the rule of the Almoravids – was re-established.

The Almoravid conquests in the east did not reach beyond the city of Algiers and its immediate region. Why they did not penetrate farther eastwards into Ifrīkiya but stopped there before accomplishing the unification of the whole Maghrib remains obscure. They certainly did not meet the Hilālī Arabs, who at that time were roaming in the more southerly regions of Ifrīkiya and eastern Algeria. The most likely reason seems to be the worsening situation in Muslim Spain, which absorbed more and more the attention of Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn, and, since his limited manpower was not sufficient for fighting on two fronts, he decided in favour of the campaign against the Christians, conscious as he was of Almoravid fame as warriors of Islam.

What had originally been no more than a local reform movement among the desert Berbers had become an empire extending from the Ebro to the Senegal rivers; its sweep of nearly 30 degrees in longitude covered a great diversity of landscapes, zones of economic activity and cultural traditions, ranging from the most fertile plains of Spain and Morocco to the deserts of Mauritania.

The Almoravid drive to the south of the Sahara

The situation in the south is unfortunately much less well known than that in the northern part of the Almoravid empire. The main difficulty lies in the scarcity of source material: the written sources come from Arabic literature, whose authors lived far away, whereas the oral traditions have undergone many changes, and, although they are beginning to be subjected to critical study, they are still difficult to use.

We do not know with any certainty the situation that existed in the Senegal valley. It now seems beyond doubt that the key points where settlements and markets developed were not on the coast but a good way inland. Excavations at Sintiu Bara have shown that it was an important site as early as the fifth–sixth centuries; at another large settlement, Ogo, iron was already being smelted in the ninth century.

We gather from Al-Bakrī and al-Idrīsī that Sillā and Takrūr (neither of which have yet been adequately pin-pointed) jointly dominated the middle Senegal in economic terms in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. All the evidence shows conclusively that between the sixth and twelfth centuries this middle region of the river was very active (particularly as regards fishing) and powerful, but all this is only faintly echoed in the written sources and oral traditions.

A little further south we have a somewhat better knowledge of a kingdom that long



13.2 Almoravid decoration: a bronze door-knocker (Fez). (UNESCO/Dominique Roger)

remained in the shadows, viz. Diafunu (Zāfun-u). This kingdom, situated roughly around the confluence of the Kolombiné and the Senegal, became Muslim in the eleventh century.

Azuḳī, which according to preliminary investigations, was active between the end of the tenth and the middle of the twelfth century, was probably a very important staging-post in this 'Senegalese system'.

The political life of this area is beginning to emerge from the shadows, at least in terms of hypotheses. It is still hard to be sure which of Sillā, Taktūr and Diafunu exercised most control over the traffic in gold, which is known to have come from more southerly areas, the most northerly being between Falamé and Bafing. The establishment of the Almoravids in the south of what is now Mauritania had an undeniable effect on the geography of the gold trade and on the competition between rival towns on the Senegal.

The question is whether the Almoravids found Muslim princes on the Senegal with whom the Berbers had been in contact since the beginning of Islamization in this area, or whether they started the conversion of the towns on the middle Senegal. The most recent studies tend to suggest that Islamization predated the Almoravid period, and may have brought about the downfall of an earlier Taktūr dynasty, which was too closely tied with the 'pagan' iron-smelters and magicians. It is now clear that Islam played an important role in the Senegal valley in the tenth and eleventh centuries and that an understanding between the Almoravids and the black Muslim rulers probably contributed to the success of the veiled warriors from the north.

Further east the situation was certainly less favourable for the Almoravids. The inland Niger delta was an ancient trading area which had been built up before the advent of Islam. It is likely that the bulk of the gold produced right up to the forestlands was collected in this area; by the tenth century at the latest, the Negro gold merchants who collected it were in contact with Ghana to the north, and probably at times also with Gao to the east. The princes who governed these two towns regulated the sale of gold to the north. The ruler of Ghana was not a Muslim at the time of the Almoravid expansion, although he maintained excellent relations with the Muslims. Many of the latter, as excavations at Kumbi Saleh have shown, lived in this market town, where the ruler of Ghana was glad to welcome them and where they could pray in a monumental mosque, certainly from the tenth century on. The whole Ghana-inland Niger delta system, organized long before the Almoravids and certainly hostile to the *Ṣanhādja*, was used to trading with the *Ifriḳīyan* merchants. There was thus likely to have been a clash between the Almoravids and the Ghana system. At present, however, it is very difficult to judge what form this confrontation could have taken.

In order to answer this question, we would need to gauge exactly the forms and degree of Islamization reached in the Sahel when the Almoravid movement developed. The first concerted major effort at conversion was the work of Saharians – the Almoravids – and dates from the eleventh century. In the preceding two or three centuries, the progress of Islam was probably more sporadic and was linked to the presence of the merchants from the north and to urbanization.⁶

6. See Chapter 3 of this volume.

The first Muslim communities at Awdāghust, Ghana, Tādmekka, Gao and no doubt other towns on the Senegal or the inland Niger delta belong to this period; the celebrated anecdote about the conversion of the king of Mallal should perhaps also be assigned to this time.

The Almoravids took their role as reformers and teachers of Sunnism very seriously. They did not start from scratch, but the upheaval south of the Sahara brought about by their conquest was certainly considerable and, moreover, was combined with the general counter-offensive of Sunnism that marked the eleventh century, after the Shī'ite triumphs of the preceding century. It is against this background that it should be possible to assess relations with Ghana.

Ghana officially went over to Islam at the end of the eleventh century, having been either conquered or converted to Māliki Sunnism. The archaeological evidence for the destruction of Ghana is not conclusive, although at Kumbi Saleh traces of its probable destruction have been found deep down, at a depth of nearly 5 metres below the present surface. The dimensions of the mosque changed after the end of the eleventh century and the great market town at this location developed most conspicuously in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These pointers go some way to suggesting that it was destroyed by the Almoravids, who had no more reason to spare their Zanāta enemies here than at Awdāghust. But conclusive proof is still lacking; and in any event, as in the case of Awdāghust, such a raid, if any, did not lead to the disappearance of the market town – quite the contrary. Archaeology still has a number of basic questions to answer in this regard.

If there was a clash, what happened to the royal capital? Did it withdraw further south, or did it also adopt Islam? What were subsequent relations with the neighbouring Soso to the south, who, according to the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts, defeated an enfeebled Ghana? Thus, at present, the whole fate of the 'Ghanaian system' linked with the inland delta largely escapes us and this is a great pity.⁷

The warlike movements that possibly then affected the Sahel were perhaps the cause of the occupation and reoccupation of important sites in the inland Niger delta, as well as of the settlement of the Tellem in the old Tolloy sites on Bandiagara cliffs. Some authors even think that the upheaval gradually reached the Chad area, but this seems less likely.

The princes of Gao were Muslims as far back as the tenth century. Traces of relations with Almoravid Spain, likewise difficult to interpret, appeared by the end of the eleventh century. Royal funerary steles have been found in the Gao-Sane necropolis to the north of Gao. The two earliest of these steles may have been carved from Spanish marble: they related to monarchs who were undoubtedly Muslim and probably Sunnite. At present little is known about them.

We do not even know the precise outcome of Abū Bakr's efforts to convert the Sahel. The date and place of his death vary considerably according to the sources. Obviously, the last word has yet to be said, and the history of the Almoravids still has significant surprises in store, even as regards religion; for the first time, a coherent Sunnite realm presented a comprehensive front and a border for the *dār-es-Islām* as against a Negro world with a different religion.

7. See Chapter 14 of this volume.

The organization of a space stretching from the Ebro to Senegal – the failure of the Almoravids

The economies of the northern part of the Almoravid bloc were already highly organized before the *Ṣanhādja* conquest. From now on they benefited from the flow of gold from West Africa. For too long now, people have written that the Almoravid conquests devastated the western seaboard of Africa. The progress of research in recent years has shown that, on the contrary, the Sahelian areas were at that time very highly integrated with the northern economies. The setting up or strengthening of new staging-posts on the connecting routes between Senegal and Morocco shows that the trails carried a considerable traffic. The long Atlantic seaboard linking countries with complementary economies must accordingly be looked at from the economic standpoint as a whole. Hence the demand for products 'from the south' in all probability increased until the middle of the twelfth century. The maintenance of this economic unity did not, of course, prevent the existence of two administrations, one in Marrakesh and the other in the Sahel; two armies, one in the south, faithful to camels, and the other entirely on horseback from the end of the eleventh century; and perhaps two different political climates. But economic unity is firmly attested by the sources. Southern Morocco benefited greatly from this boom. Al-Idrīsī eloquently described the increase in wealth in the case of *Aghmāt-Warīka*, whose inhabitants went into the countries of the blacks with caravans carrying copper, brass, blankets, woollen garments, turbans, cloaks, glass, beads, mother of pearl, precious stones, spices of all kinds, perfumes and wrought ironwork. *Aghmāt* was not alone in benefiting from the economic boom. The whole of the mountainous part of Morocco supplied increased quantities of copper, iron and silver for export: and in the twelfth century there were real battles for control of the mines between the supporters of the Almohads and those of the Almoravids. Excavations in the *Chichāwa* area west of Marrakesh have revealed the lavishness of living conditions in the Almoravid period: the stucco work and painted decorations are worthy of comparison with others found in the north and south.

Economic prosperity, which obviously only reached certain urban circles and people close to those in high places, naturally made for the development of sometimes ostentatious luxury, which the Almohads were strongly to condemn. No town has yielded more important remains than Marrakesh, the Almoravids' most original piece of town-planning. Al-Idrīsī gives us an interesting picture of the town when it was built, mentioning particularly the palace of the 'Emir of the Muslims', 'Alī ben Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn, which was known as *Dār al-Ḥadjar* (the stone house). Archaeology has made it possible to find this palace, which was 'a marvel of architecture' in this area for the period in question, and it has also made it possible to reconstruct part of the plan of the Almoravid mosque and completely uncover a superbly decorated fountain given to the inhabitants for their ablutions. The northernmost limit of the Almoravids' lavish decoration was in Spain, on the Ebro, in the *Aljaferia* at Saragossa: nothing now remains of it but parts of arches.

Marrakesh also became a brilliant literary centre, where court poets from Spain continued careers which had begun under the *reyes de taifas*, but had been ruined by



13.3 Almoravid gold coins. (Photo: copyright Bernard Nantet)

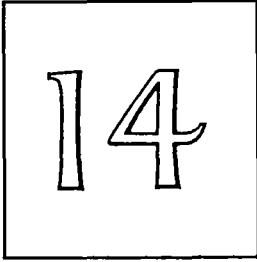
the Almoravid conquest of al-Andalus and the initial severity that accompanied it. This initial severity, which aroused, for example, al-Bakrī's deep misgivings about the Almoravids, eventually softened in terms of both action and behaviour. This was the first time that the high Islamic culture of the day had been transplanted to Morocco on such a scale. With it came luxury and a taste for a sumptuous life style, with which the Almoravids were to be reproached by their enemies. But the legal severity of the *fukahā'*, the allies of the ruling house, which often contrasted with the permissiveness of the glittering life in Marrakesh, had not disappeared: it imposed a sometimes paranoid Māliki Sunnism – a fact of great importance for the history of western Islam, including Islam in Africa – but it also aroused many hostile reactions by its excesses.

The animosity aroused in Spain and Morocco by the narrow-minded policy of the Mālikite *fukahā'* and by their hostility towards any new ideas must have been rather deep. They attacked in particular the works of al-Ḡhazālī, which had then been introduced into the west and whose mystical tone perplexed the *fukahā'*, who supported the Almoravids. The atmosphere in the last decades of Almoravid power was poisoned by the repressive measures of the Mālikite jurists, who had the support of the princes; this repression lent colour to the reproaches addressed to the ruling dynasty, in particular by the infant Almohad movement.

One of the causes of the early decline of the Almoravid dynasty was the weakness of their administration. This was almost non-existent at the local level, where power was exercised through relatives and clients. In more than one case the misdeeds condemned in the rulers of al-Andalus in the early years of rectitude soon reappeared, particularly in regard to taxation. The rigidity flaunted in the legal field and in inquisitorial procedures cannot conceal a certain doctrinal ambivalence, and revolts were not infrequent. That which was to sweep away the dynasty developed in the Atlas, and the Almoravid government could do nothing but contain it for as long as possible. The weapon which Yūsuf ibn Tāshfīn used against the *reyes de taifas* at the end of the eleventh century was to be turned against the Almoravids, who were accused in their turn of oppression, injustice, corruption and debauchery – and also of lack of rigour in religion. The undeniable wealth of the Almoravid state apparatus was to fail to withstand the onslaught of the Almohads, ferocious as it was and well organized from their mountain bases.⁸

History has for far too long been very hard on the Almoravids, who have been charged with every possible error and have been suspected of intervening like 'barbarians' in Spain, where compromises between Muslims and Christians were arrived at on the basis of capitulations. They upset too many interests for their irruption to be easily forgiven; and they introduced too many new faces, including some blacks, to escape arousing mistrust and hostility. It will be very interesting in years to come to observe the process of rehabilitation of this dynasty – which has already begun – and the search for a more balanced appraisal of its historical role.

8. See Chapter 2 of Volume IV.



Trade and trade routes in West Africa

Over the past twenty years research has considerably changed the information base available for the study of this subject and in consequence nearly all recent work has cast doubt on findings that were taken for granted two decades ago.

The existence of a local trade economy based on the barter of consumer goods or locally made products is generally accepted both for Africa and elsewhere very early on, and certainly for our period. It does not directly affect the subject of this chapter. A long-distance trade economy involving traders rested on the existence of demand from consumer markets for certain rare and costly products (such as salt, kola, gold, wheat, fabrics and copper), which had to come from 'elsewhere'. New needs for new products could be created among distant trading partners on the basis of existing routes; dangerous very long-distance trade could only be established if it reflected imperious needs.

The Sahara, a gulf that has widened since the neolithic period

The trans-Saharan trade was not a timeless phenomenon. It arose, developed and underwent major changes, which we need to study as best we can.

From the point of view of this trade, the seventh–eleventh centuries were of crucial importance. It was at this period that regular links grew up between the Mediterranean economies, with their demand particularly for gold, and those of the Saharan Sahel and the savannas linking it to the forest region, which used salt but produced little of it. But it has long been a moot point how far back these crossings go.

Except at a few rare points where the northern and southern 50 mm isohyets are close together, crossing the Sahara necessitates either finding reliable wells and oases or else travelling with mounts economical in water and carrying much of the water needed for human survival. This crossing is dangerous, and is certainly not attempted without good reason.

This observation, on which all researchers are nowadays in agreement, makes the old discussions about great Saharan crossings in more remote periods somewhat academic. Even if it is one day established that they took place, the inexorable drawing apart of the two verges of the desert made them difficult or impossible by the end of what is usually called antiquity.¹

1. See Chapter 20 of Volume II.

In the fifth and the sixth centuries, the Berbers were the first to be in a position to attempt the crossing, thanks to the rapid spread of the camel. This was the only animal that could have made possible the long rides of between one and two thousand kilometres between the two verges of the Sahara. Neither chariots (no longer widely believed to have been used for commercial purposes), horses (then recently introduced into the Sahara), donkeys (old and frugal habitués of these parts) nor the slow-moving draught oxen attested by rock art met the needs of difficult, heavy, long-distance trade.

The next question was which way to go to limit the risks. The pains taken by the Arab authors of the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries to describe the minutiae of trans-Saharan trade routes shows clearly that any improvisation was likely to be disastrous. There is sometimes mention of a coastal route, but recent research has brought out its difficulties and hence its dangers: between latitudes 26°N and 24°N, the completely inhospitable coast is devoid of any trace of human existence, even for the neolithic period.

Further east, in what is now Mauritania, travel was favoured by the fact that the northern and southern 50 mm isohyets came closer together: this was to be the site of Azukī. Still further east were the Saura valley, and Gurāra and Tawāt in the north, and these soon attracted the attention of the caravaners. The exceptional importance of this route was to make it one of the transit points most frequented by caravans from the tenth century onwards. Still further east, it was necessary to go to Wargla, in the Mzāb, and to slip southwards to Adrār des Ifoghas and the valley of Tilemsi to find a route as easy as the foregoing.

The first move towards links with the *Bilād al-Sūdān* can be dated from the second half of the eighth century, but these links were not firmly established or attested until the tenth century. While the Berber-speakers were the first to experiment with trans-Saharan routes, their opening up to regular trade needed economic incentives and human determination; 'natural conditions' were not enough to create routes: for that economic needs were required.

The role of the Garamantes remains a subject of controversy, but it seems that trade took place between the Fazzān and Chad and also that Kawār supplied salt to the south. But we cannot yet sketch out a pattern for any trade there may have been with the peoples living south of Chad, although a route from Chad to Tripolitania may perhaps have served for the export of slaves from a date unknown.

As we approach the Nile, the networks are much longer-standing on the river and on a route parallel to it in the west along the chain of oases. There were also east-west links between these oases and the river. The Nubian buffer blocked direct access by the Muslims of Egypt via the Dārūr to the Chad basin. This remained the case until the fourteenth century – a factor of great economic significance. The only way open lay along an old route from the Nile to the oasis of Siwa. Further on, the route went through the oasis of Kufra, probably crossed Kawār from east to west, passing through al-Ḳaṣāba, and reached Maranda (Marandet) and Gao.

Al-Ya'qūbī speaks of this route, vaguely but in the present tense, in the ninth century. A century later, Ibn Ḥawqal regarded it as abandoned because it was too dangerous. The latter's descriptions mark a significant departure: he considered the

'Egyptian' route to be in decline, but also disregarded links between the areas where the Ibāḍites and the Sudanese lived and devoted his attention only to the 'Fātimid' route from Sidjilmāsa to Ghana. Moreover, he says explicitly that this was the busiest route 'in his day'.

This should be a warning to us: everything to do with the description of the routes is political and stems from choices made by the writer. Ibn Ḥawkal's neglect of the Egyptian route, however, was probably not the result merely of ideological and political factors, but almost certainly reflected radical economic changes between the ninth and tenth centuries.

Life in the Sahelian zone as revealed today by archaeological research

Recent research on iron and copper in West Africa is sufficient in itself to cast doubt on most of the received ideas about pre-Christian times. In the period before the great commercial crossings of the Sahara, these two essential commodities were marketable at long range south of the desert, without help from the north.

For the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries, disregarding influences from across the Sahara, excavations have shown that there was activity both in the Senegal valley and in the southern half of that country. It was also present from Niani to Tondidaru, along the valleys of the Niger as far as the outskirts of present-day Niamey. Maranda, Ife and sites in Ivory Coast also show great activity. Community life, with metal-working, the division of labour and trade, was organized in the Sahel before any signs of the appearance of a powerful Saharan trade. We can now say without fear of being proved wrong by future research that all the infrastructure of settlement and economic life in the valleys of the Senegal and Niger, and no doubt further south, already existed during these 'dark centuries'.

Important Sahelian cultures are now being resurrected by research – cultures with which the traders from the north were to come into contact. For the periods before the seventh century, Tondidaru, Jenne-Jeno and Bandiagara have yielded a rich harvest as regards the trade in copper and iron in the inland Niger delta. The site of Sintiu Bara, the findings from which have not yet been completely published, has yielded bronze equipment of great interest. For the eighth and ninth centuries, Tegdaoust has yielded abundant consistent traces of copper-alloy metallurgy, one of the raw materials for which probably came from Akdjudjt. The earliest archaeological evidence of the use of *cire perdue* moulds has been found there for the same early periods; this local metallurgy certainly played an inter-regional economic role very early on.

Thus nowadays everything points to the fact that the societies with which the northerners were to come into contact via the Sahara were cohesive and well organized, equipped with towns and capable of trading, sometimes at long distance. Moreover, from the latter point of view, it is noteworthy that salt trading networks probably existed from this period.

The situation north of the Sahara

It will suffice for our purpose to single out those features which may be important for economic history and the history of trans-Saharan links.

In what is now Morocco, two areas concern us: the Sūs, between the Atlas and the Anti-Atlas, enjoyed at a very early date the reputation of a land of plenty; Tāmdūlt emerged here as an early terminus for the southward routes. Others multiplied on both sides of the Atlas and in Dar'a valley until the tenth century. On the Sahara side of the Middle Atlas, Sidjilmāsa began, certainly in the second half of the eighth century, to act as a caravan port for links with the south.

Once the Berbers had been pacified, and especially in the Aghlabid period, Ifrīqiya took on greater importance. Of most interest to us here, in the context of trans-Saharan links, is the existence of their dinar coinage. It has to be asked whether much of this gold came from the conquest of Sicily or whether it was brought from the *Bilād al-Sūdān* in the ninth century, and there is still considerable debate among historians on the subject. In his studies of the Ibādites, T. Lewicki has stressed that there were political and ideological barriers to the southwards penetration of the Aghlabids; but even though the Ibādites monopolized traffic on the Saharan routes they did not refuse to sell gold to the governors of Kayrawān. It is not now possible to know in detail what economic links there may have been between Ifrīqiya and West Africa in the eighth and ninth centuries, or even whether the Aghlabids had a consistent policy on this matter. It may be more or less assumed that the Ibādites themselves tried at that time to organize a regular trans-Saharan link. The presence of gold in Ifrīqiya suggests this, and the certainty that links existed between Tāhert and Gao gives this hypothesis still greater credibility. Thus, Tāhert became one of the main keys to the first regular trans-Saharan links known to us. These links were with Gao, not with Ghana, and it would be reasonable to wonder whether the traders of Tāhert did not try to supply Gao with the salt which its princes stockpiled and resold.

Thus for the eighth and ninth centuries we are for the present reduced to hypotheses about the establishment of what were to be the great northern termini of the trans-Saharan trade (Tāmdūlt, Sidjilmāsa, Tāhert, Wargla and the towns of the Djarīd) and the early organization of the trans-Saharan caravans. The crucial events that led to a regular trans-Saharan trade took place in the period from 850 to 950.

An essential question has to be asked: what was there to be obtained from the other side of the desert? For the south, the answer is probably very little! Salt, while not plentiful, was no doubt in relatively good supply thanks to the number of production techniques and collection and manufacturing points.

In fact, while the huge disparity between the price of salt imported from the north and that current on the Mediterranean cannot be denied, there are some finer points to be made. Many Arab authors stress the importance of Awlīl as the main salt-mine south of the Sahara. Its output, carried by boat on 'the Nile' (the Senegal, the Niger), reached the whole of the Country of the Blacks. Everything in the accounts of these authors goes to show that the traders from the north, initially customers of Awlīl, were obliged, on leaving this mine, to pass through Awdāghust, before gradually discovering a way of shortening such a route by using reserves of salt placed on the north-south

route in the middle of the Sahara. Similarly, the south did not need more copper (contrary to the opinion held twenty years ago) or iron, which was already produced in a scattered but adequate fashion. What demand there was came more from the north than from the south.

As regards West Africa and our period, the demand for slaves has probably been greatly exaggerated. Claude Cahen pointed out in 1964 that the slave-trade does not in general seem to have been a source of large profits but their import was indispensable, for 'the general economic boom . . . demanded and allowed the employment of a growing labour force, which the slave trade was the easiest way of obtaining'. The slave traffic thus represented a definite flow, but was probably not the main economic driving-force and hence it does not explain trans-Saharan trade.

We are thus thrown back on the product of which all the Arab authors speak and to which all the historians have paid attention, viz. gold. The Muslim world, a significant consumer of gold, especially since the reforms at the end of the seventh century, behaved in relation to its fringes as an enormous demand area. The Muslim west, except for Ifrīkiya under the Aghlabids, did not mint gold before the tenth century. But, from then on, it became a big consumer of gold for coinage. It is also for that time that information about African gold production became (at least relatively) less mythological and more geographically accurate.

When writing about West African gold, most of the Muslim authors employ the word *tibr* which is commonly translated as 'gold-dust'. In reality, this term has the meaning of 'native, untreated and unminted gold', in every case gold in the rough state as opposed to worked gold (Arab. *dhahab*). It is only by taking into account this precise meaning of *tibr* that we can interpret correctly the many texts alluding to this kind of gold in West Africa.

In the context of the *Bitād al-Sūdān*, the word *dhahab* was gradually replaced in favour of *tibr*. *Tibr*, in the long run, probably denoted West African gold, in whatever form it was received (specks, dust, nuggets or ingots) and regardless of its socio-economic origins, as a specific quality of gold pure enough even without refining to be used directly for coinage. It did not need 'purification', because it contained few impurities and was unalloyed. In fact, laboratory research has shown that this gold contains silver and a small percentage of copper; indeed, this small percentage of copper makes it possible to identify the dinars which were struck from West African gold.

If (as we think) *tibr* indeed denotes (at least from the eleventh century onwards) the quality of West African gold that could be used without refining or alloying for minting coinage, this would explain both why al-Bakrī says this gold is the best in the world and also people's keenness to obtain it. A recent survey in the archives of Genoa confirms that, after the fourteenth century, the Genoese also tended to use *tibr* to denote a quality of gold.

The Arab sources attest that gold existed in wrought form in West Africa; but apparently those in power south of the Sahara, whether Muslim or not, never, even after 1050, turned this gold into coins. Never to this day has any trace of a die or mint been found south of the desert. This fact leads us to ask some essential questions in the field of economic history. Given the way this gold was produced from thousands of widely separated shafts, would the direct use of gold for coinage have been feasible

in the south? Would not this gold, even struck into 4-gram coins, have had far too much purchasing power for the type of local trade?

In the north, especially from the tenth century onwards, the minting of coinage by the authorities became the rule. Trade appeared in response to the annual currency requirement at the behest of the gold-minting dynasties in North Africa and thereafter in Spain: the Aghlabids in the ninth century; the Fāṭimids in the tenth century; the Umayyads of Spain likewise in the tenth century; the Fāṭimids of Egypt after 970; the Zirīds of Ifrikiya, and then the Almoravids.

But of course it was especially when the Fāṭimids, the Umayyads and then the Almoravids undertook coinage on a scale unprecedented in the Muslim west that the vitality of the trans-Saharan trade became apparent. The annual minting requirement in the north cannot be accurately estimated but it may be supposed to have fluctuated around 1 ton at the most. In any event, and even allowing for the needs of jewellery, the building up of savings and annual losses of coinage, it is difficult to imagine that the tonnage imported could have been much over 2 tons, 3 at the most. This is not an impossible task, as it represents only thirty–forty camel-loads. Information from the Arabic sources leave the impression that these figures are much too modest and that the caravans contained more camels, at least on the outward journey, and grew in number every day. In any case, we now have the serious problem of the obvious physical imbalance between the weight of the material to be brought across the desert from the north (and hence the number of camels on the outward journey) and the much smaller weight on the return journey. What became of the redundant camels? Were they eaten, or sold in the Sahel, in which case their numbers must have rapidly increased? The fact that these weights are so low explains not only the bitter rivalry for control of the routes and the extent to which their surveillance or the plundering of the caravans was necessary or profitable, but also the extent to which each of the northern termini for the circulation of this gold needed regular annual journeys by the Saharan caravans to maintain the credibility of its coinage. Similarly, we can now see why, when Mansa Mūsā much later brought about a ton of gold to Cairo, the gold price was upset. It would be naïve to suppose that a flood of gold came out of West Africa every year.

We can also make rough estimates of the work represented by this annual exportable output, plus perhaps the same amount of gold again remaining behind, if we remember that one shaft yielded between 2.5 and 5 grams of gold. Between 240,000 and 480,000 shafts thus needed to be dug each year, which represents a considerable mobilization of labour. Even if we add on the output from gold-washing, the fact remains that this activity which, after all, was seasonal, must have mobilized hundreds of thousands of people in West Africa each year once the demand was strong and regular.

When did the regular annual caravan trade supplying gold for the Muslim mints begin?

We can rule out the first half of the eighth century, which saw disturbances in the north, hesitant attempts to cross the desert, and raids that may have been spectacular but were quite ineffectual. On the other hand, such trade becomes a serious proposition, for the second half of the eighth century and the ninth century, when Sidjilmāsa was founded or developed, Tāhert was booming and Ibāḍite trade was developing. It

seems to us that this period could well have been that of the still hazardous and timid trading suggested by the texts of al-Ya'kūbī or even Ibn Hawqal. The excavations at Tegdaoust, almost certainly the site of the ancient Awdāghust, have yielded valuable information on the very period, the eighth–ninth centuries, about which so little is still known. The objects imported from the north are of special interest: although there are not yet many of them, they are evidence of desert crossings. Precious and semiprecious stones and glazed pottery have already been found. Very careful examination as to provenance has not yet yielded absolutely positive conclusions, except in one case: some potsherds from the lower levels of the site come from Ifrīqiya. Glassware, we also now know, crossed the Sahara. The date of the levels at which they were found is undoubtedly earlier than 900. They are no doubt the first definite evidence of the existence of trans-Saharan links in the eighth and ninth centuries.

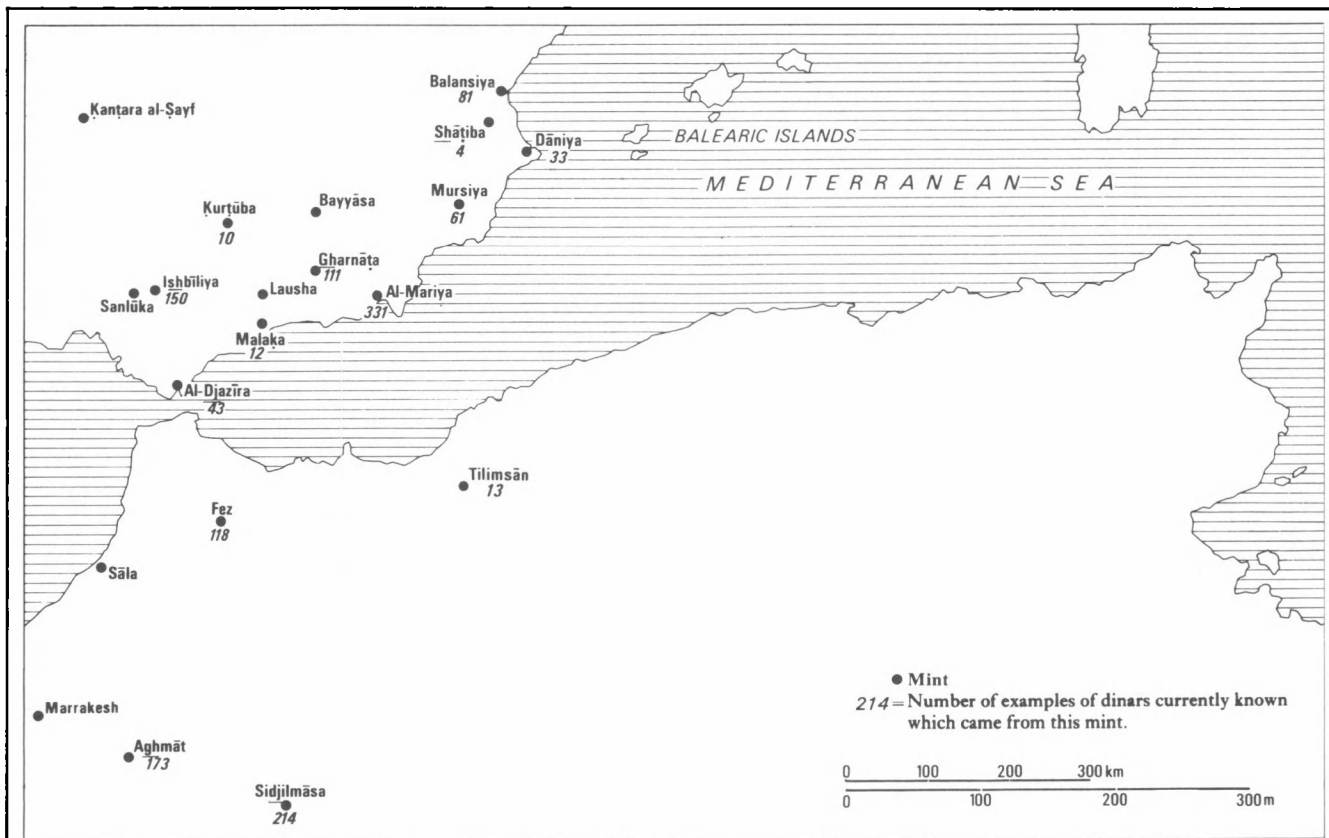
The development of trans-Saharan trade from 900 to 1100

In the Muslim world, as in the Roman tradition, the minting of coins was a regalian right which the rulers enforced quite severely. This monopoly of coinage had nothing to do with the legal currency of the coins minted, the tokens accepted in transactions still being a matter for agreement between the parties. It was obviously more convenient to use coins that inspired confidence by virtue of the integrity of their minting.

The number of gold mints just before the Fāṭimids seized power was rather small: there was one at Kayrawān in the hands of the Aghlabids and one at Miṣr-Fuṣṭāt run by the Ikhshīdids. Neither Spain nor the north of the continent of Africa struck much gold during this period. Indeed, the Umayyads of Spain and the Idrīsids in what is now Morocco used local resources to strike silver dirhams. The Fāṭimids' gold policy radically altered this state of affairs: the tenth century saw the opening of gold mints in parts of the Muslim world where there had earlier not been any, under the strict supervision of the two rival dynasties, the Fāṭimids of Ifrīqiya and the Umayyads of Spain. The Fāṭimids were the first in Islam to be so bold as to strike Caliphal gold coins in competition with the hitherto acknowledged authority; and their coins were intended to demonstrate the power and glory of the new authority. The Fāṭimids' need for gold was obviously motivated by three factors: ideology, political realism and economic realism. Hence their coinage is unprecedentedly important for the history of African economic relations; it started an ideological war of currency in the Muslim west that was not to end with them.

The Caliphs were at pains to mint coins with a high standard of fineness, and thus to build up both a reserve of precious metal and an international capital of credibility. After 953 and in particular after 975, dinars struck in the name of the Fāṭimids, whether at Sidjilmāsa or Mahdiyya, were in demand by traders as far away as the East because of their exceptional quality.

The Fāṭimids sought to provide a plentiful supply of gold coinage, given a demand which they had themselves largely helped to create and which was probably not primarily economic. They took pains to organize the annual trans-Saharan gold trade on a quite unprecedented basis. The results of research at Tegdaoust point unmistakably in that direction. Glass weights, all of Fāṭimid origin, have been found, some of them



14.3 Almoravid gold coinage: mints (J. Devisse)

in stratigraphic position such that they have helped to date the site. Their arrival coincides with the peak in the town's importing activity and its most spectacular urban development. Because they always had difficulty in making their way via Wargla and Tadmekka – the Ibādite route to black Africa – the Fāṭimids made the Sidjilmāsa–Ghana route the main avenue to black African gold for at least two centuries and the supply line for their gold coinage and the building up of their war treasure. For as long as they stayed in Ifrīqiya, after the defeat of Abū Yazīd, they struck coins that inspired confidence in merchants.

The successes achieved by the Umayyad agents after the Fāṭimids' departure for Egypt, the diversion of gold to Spain or at least to the western Maghrib, and the transfer of the Sidjilmāsa mint to the Umayyads show that, by the last decade of the tenth century, the beneficiaries of the influx of gold were no longer the Fāṭimids. The last Fāṭimid weights so far found at Tegdaoust are at most a little later than 1000; they may be earlier. The Fāṭimid dinars struck in Ifrīqiya certainly contained 'Sudanese gold', but the same is no longer true of the dinars which those same Fāṭimids struck in Egypt. This change occurred in 1047, at the time of the break between the Zīrīds and the Fāṭimids.

The point is that everything suggests that supplies of western gold to Ifrīqiya stopped after 990, and that this radical change in the gold routes had serious economic consequences for Ifrīqiya.

When, having taken over the title of Caliphs the Spanish Umayyads also decided to mint gold after 929, the coinage was none too good; it only really became so after 987–8, when dinars struck at Sidjilmāsa appeared. But the minting remained predominantly concentrated in the Cordoban mints, under the direct control of the authorities.

The Umayyad episode was shorter than the Fāṭimid, but it obviously kept up the pressure of heavy demand on African gold production and on the trans-Saharan traffic. The *reyes de taifas* also struck a little gold inefficiently and with difficulty. But the real relief came later with the Almoravids. This last phase of our period was probably the most brilliant and important for the history of trans-Saharan links, although in many respects it is still the least known.

A look at the map (14.3) of the places where the Almoravids struck gold at once shows major innovations. The eastern half of the Maghrib was quite without mints, and Tlemcen itself was only a marginal mint. On the other hand, the territory of what is now Morocco, except for the trans-Saharan trade (Sidjilmāsa, Aghmāt and Nūl Lamṭa), struck gold, as did Fez and Marrakesh, the capitals, and Salā, a strategic town. There were seven mints in the western Maghrib and fourteen in Spain.

The minting was certainly prolific. From 1058 to 1088 it took place in Africa, the earliest dinars being struck at Sidjilmāsa in 1056–7. Overall, mintage was especially prolific after 1100.

The abundance and regularity of the mintage, which was virtually unrivalled as far as Fāṭimid Egypt (then certainly deprived of Sudanese gold), made the Almoravid dinars (for the first time in western Islam) an economically powerful currency, even though it no longer attained the prestigious standards of fineness of the Fāṭimid coins.

The west had insistently called for 'marabotins'; after 1070 the Fāṭimid world itself was keen to have Almoravid dinars.

By way of conclusion to these coinage problems it remains to ask ourselves some very difficult questions, to which there are at the moment no definite answers.

Was West African gold treated before being exported to the north? We are inclined to think that *tibr* underwent no refining and that it was used as it was in the mints. At the very most it was perhaps melted down in the south to make it easier to transport. At Tegdaoust we found gold wire, drawn out on drawing-stones, which have also been discovered. It was obviously prepared for the filigree work. If the gold was melted down south of the Sahara, in what form was it finally exported? The idea that ingots, or indeed blanks ready for minting, were exported is all the more appealing because there was no refining problem to speak of, and the gold could be used unrefined and unalloyed without too much concern about its standard of fineness. At Tegdaoust we found five half-ingots of gold, with other gold and silver pieces. The five half-ingots, sheared more or less down the middle, had been cast either in a sow channel in the sand or in an ingot mould. Were these objects intended for goldsmithing locally, or to be divided into blanks for minting?

Trade routes, gold routes and commercial contacts south of the desert

Apart from the archaeological evidence, work on Saharan crossings is also assisted by Arabic written sources from the north, particularly from the tenth to the twelfth century; of special importance are the contributions of al-Bakrī and al-Idrīsī.

Let us not choose *a priori* between them, but rather try to understand the concerns and the information that influenced them while they were writing.

In Fig. 14.5 we have set out seven main routes between the *Biṭāḍ al-Sūdān* and the world of the north indicated by al-Bakrī, but nearly all derived from different informants. As he had no means of directly checking the information he relied on, he set it out one piece after another, with no way of cross-checking it as it came from his informants.

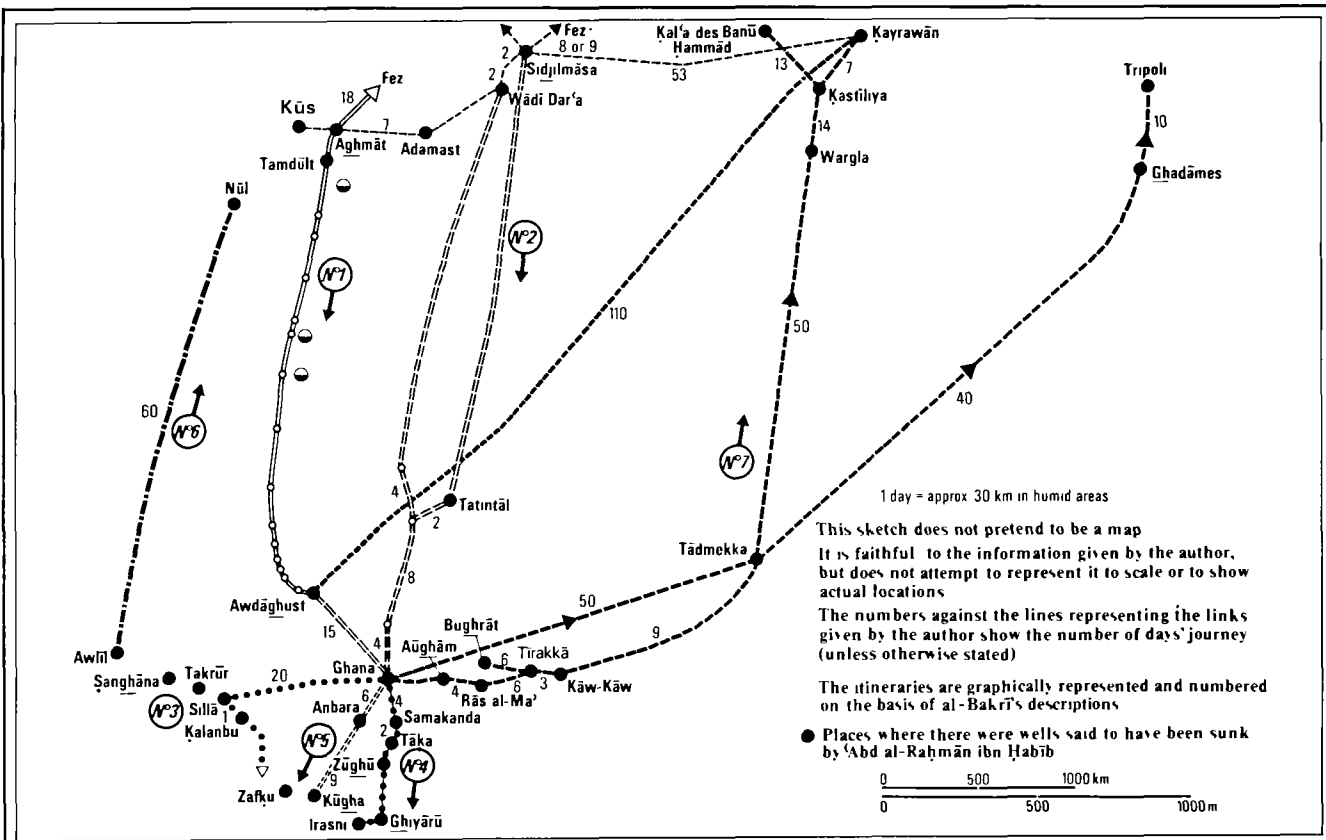
Route no. 1 was the 'royal' route, from Tamdūlt to Awdāghust, on which details abound. There were not many other links with Awdāghust: it was fifteen days' journey to Ghana and 110 to Ḳayrawān, whereas in a southward direction Awdāghust seems to have been a *cul-de-sac*. As for the routes from Sidjilmāsa (routes no. 2 on the chart), which passed further east in quest of salt from Tatintāl in particular, they ended not at Awdāghust but at Ghana. Oddly enough, Awdāghust was linked neither to the towns on the Senegal river nor to Awlīl; in both cases this seems unlikely, since it had special importance for the former, given that al-Bakrī himself, elsewhere, already names Sillā as a competitor of Ghana's in the gold trade.

The Ghana system was much more complex and complete. In the south, one route led to Ḡhiyārū. Historians are divided as to the location of the place-names quoted on our route no. 4. The fifth likewise feeds the flames of controversy: some say Kūgha was to the west, others much further east.

The Senegal area is described in route no. 3; but here again localizations and distances are vague. From Ḳalanbu, the last town mentioned, the route led to the 'south'.



14.4 Tegdaoust/Awdāghust: Fāṭimid glass weight, tenth century. (IMRS, Nouakchott)



14.5 Al-Bakri's itineraries: western part. (J. Devise)

This was the home of the Zaḥku, whom T. Lewicki proposes to be identified as those people whom Yāḳūt later called the Zāfūn, and whom he localized on the Kolombine, west of present-day Diara, and hence east of the towns mentioned by al-Bakrī. Further 'south' were other 'pagan' peoples. In the case of routes nos. 3, 4 and 5, our knowledge of Africa suffers from the almost insurmountable drawback for critical purposes of the heterogeneity of the basic information used by al-Bakrī.

If we leave Ghana by the network of routes no. 7, we several times run into further major difficulties of interpretation: the piecemeal stretch from Ghana to Gao (17 days) is too short, as though the author had been misinformed; and the indication 'back to the north' given to the description of the stretches to Wargla and the Djarid, Ifrīḳiya, Ghadāmes and Tripoli is also noteworthy. This eastern network 'from Ghana' forms a coherent whole from its southern terminus to Kal'a of the Banū Ḥammād – hence the information dates from the eleventh century – and to its eastern terminus at Tripoli; and there is a good chance that it represents reliable information for the eleventh century, before the Almoravids. Al-Bakrī mentions a parallel route between Tadmekka and Ghadāmes to look for semiprecious stones; as we shall see later, it is highly likely that this route can be completely identified.

The dinars used by the inhabitants of Tadmekka were 'of pure gold' and they had the particular feature of being 'bald' (in Arabic *ṣulā'*). From the way al-Bakrī writes, we may reasonably suppose that they were blanks prepared for export to the north that had not yet been imprinted; *ṣulā'* in this case is presumably the opposite of *mankūsh* (engraved). Hence this was not minting, but a prior stage, since all the mints were in the north.

Al-Idrīsī's methods and aims and the information he gives are quite different from his predecessor's. He set out to describe Africa by reference to a rigid framework of 'climates' (*iklīm*) and their subdivisions. While he gives the lengths of stretches in days like his predecessor (sometimes taking them from him, sometimes from shared sources), he treats the information quite differently (14.6)

As far as the eastern routes are concerned, al-Idrīsī first describes a set of land links from the Niger to the Nile across Kawār. This contains new information that calls for careful critical study. Another section is devoted to the description (with highly overstated distances) of tracks in the central Sahara that come out in the north via Ghadāmes; this system seems far more independent in relation to the Tadmekka-Wargla route than in al-Bakrī's descriptions. What is striking, therefore, is the attention paid, in the twelfth century, to Niger-Nile and Niger-Chad links and the return to greater independence for the 'Libyan' route terminating at Ghadāmes and Tripolitania.

In the western part, comparisons with al-Bakrī offer several interesting points. The great meridian route singled out by al-Bakrī has disappeared. In the north, Sidjilmāsa has replaced Tamdūlt; this is perhaps because of the continued obstacle to movement represented by the Barghawāṭa.

Going southward, we now avoid Awdāghust and even Ghana. The big novelty is that we come directly to the towns on the Senegal river, despite considerable difficulties due to the crossing of Ḳamnūriyya or the desert of Nīsar. These towns on the river, where gold was found, were reached in about 40 days. From Sillā or Takrūr

to Sidjilmāsa took 40 days; likewise from Awlīl to Sidjilmāsa; and again from the river to Sidjilmāsa via Ḳamnūriyya and Azukī. Hence, it can be taken for granted that there was a route from Sidjilmāsa to the Senegal river via Azukī.

Al-Idrīsī pushes Awdāghust far to the east, as being one month's journey from Awlīl. Links with it were much less important than a century or two earlier. Although obviously less important economically than the market towns on the Senegal, the town kept some links which cannot be disregarded. Al-Idrīsī says that Awdāghust was twelve days away from Ghana, and also from Barīsā, which also gave access to trade with the south. Barīsā (identical with the Y.r.s.nī of al-Bakrī) was important for the south: it was the advance post for contact with the 'Lamlam' and the Malal, and also linked to the Senegal river system via Takrūr. It thus becomes a link in both the more northerly systems, via the towns on the river and via Awdāghust and Ghana, although al-Bakrī, in his account, was less precise about the role played by Y.r.s.nī. However, when the situation is also looked at from south to north, i.e. from Barīsā, Takrūr's domination of the middle Senegal valley and its hold over the gold trade take on a new dimension and bring out the changes in balance that had come about in the organization of gold exporting in the space of one century.

The Ghana system is both more confused in detail and also more realistic as regards distances, but there are some inaccuracies in the data for links with the east, to Gao and even to the Niger Bend.

According to al-Idrīsī, the whole of this second section of the first 'climate', including the Wanḳāra and the towns of the Bend as far as Tiraḳḳā, was under the domination of Ghana.

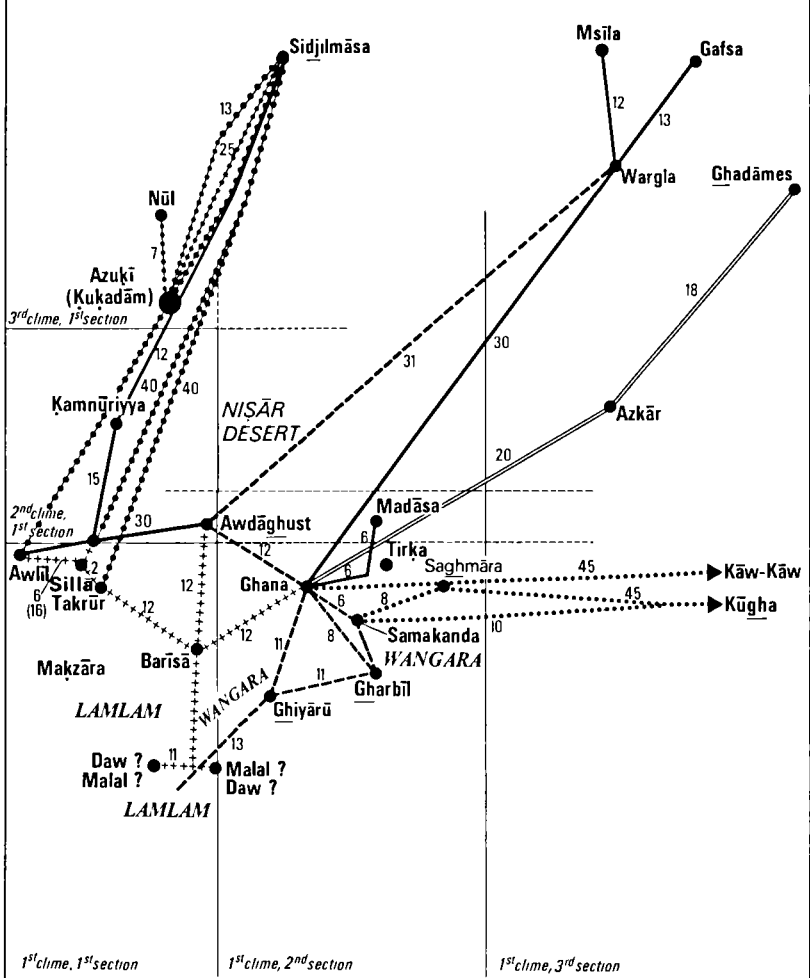
Hence, we may venture the hypothesis that there were now two major systems competing in the search of gold. One was centred on the towns on the Senegal and linked via Azukī with Sidjilmāsa; this was the direct reflection of Almoravid ascendancy and their alliance with Takrūr. The other, commanding the countries on the Niger, was dominated by Ghana and more closely linked to Wargla than in the past.

Al-Idrīsī's itineraries, which differ from his predecessor's for the whole of the Sahara area, do not constitute the new and decisive material that might have been expected, after two centuries of links, for the areas south of the Senegal and Niger. There are many possible explanations for this, the most probable being that the blacks did not let the merchants from the north travel about much and that conversion to Islam, which was genuine and widespread in the bend of the Senegal and at Gao at the end of the eleventh century, was still hesitant further south. In any case, al-Idrīsī should not be relied on any more than one should rely on his predecessors for a detailed account of the life of the blacks south of the rivers.

The siting of trading places, as we have seen from the start, was closely linked with the position of the isohyets: there had to be enough water for the beasts of burden and all the activities of several thousand men. Unfortunately, our knowledge of the development of the environment in the northern zone is still very rudimentary. Where trans-Saharan links are concerned, archaeological research in the northern part of Africa has unfortunately yielded as little for the tenth and eleventh centuries as for the preceding two centuries.

Happily, things are better on the other side of the desert. For Azukī we now know

This sketch does not pretend to be a map.
 It is faithful to the information given by the author,
 but does not attempt to represent it to scale or to show
 actual locations.
 The numbers against the lines representing the links
 given by the author show the number of days' journey
 (unless otherwise stated).



1 day = approx 30 km in humid areas
 0 250 500 km
 0 250 500m

14.6 Al-Idrīsī's itineraries: western part. (J. Devisse)

that the site saw two major occupations: one in the tenth–twelfth centuries and the other in the fifteenth–seventeenth centuries. Work in progress suggests that the Almoravid capital mentioned in the texts is to yield interesting information.

For Awdāghust the results obtained bring out the fact that, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the site was a large town. Industrial activity started there in a non-urban setting as early as the eighth–ninth centuries. In the ninth and tenth centuries – fairly quickly but without fundamental cultural change – the place began to look like a town, with streets, squares, a mosque, private buildings and the growth of luxury consumption. All the excavators have noticed a break in the life style of the town in the middle of the eleventh century, but it resumed a different and distinctive way of life after that date. Awdāghust was a town of several thousand inhabitants, which had been very busy in the tenth and eleventh centuries, but had undoubtedly been struck by a disaster in the middle of the latter century. The main reasons for its decline lie outside our chronological framework and the scope of this chapter.

The excavations at Ghana (Kumbi Saleh) have also made it possible to measure the long occupancy of this site; occupations from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries are in layers one above the other to a thickness of more than 7 metres and a very important mosque has gradually been uncovered and preserved. The royal capital of which al-Bakrī speaks has not yet been found. Very few objects imported from the north have so far been discovered, but signs of links with Awdāghust are indisputable.

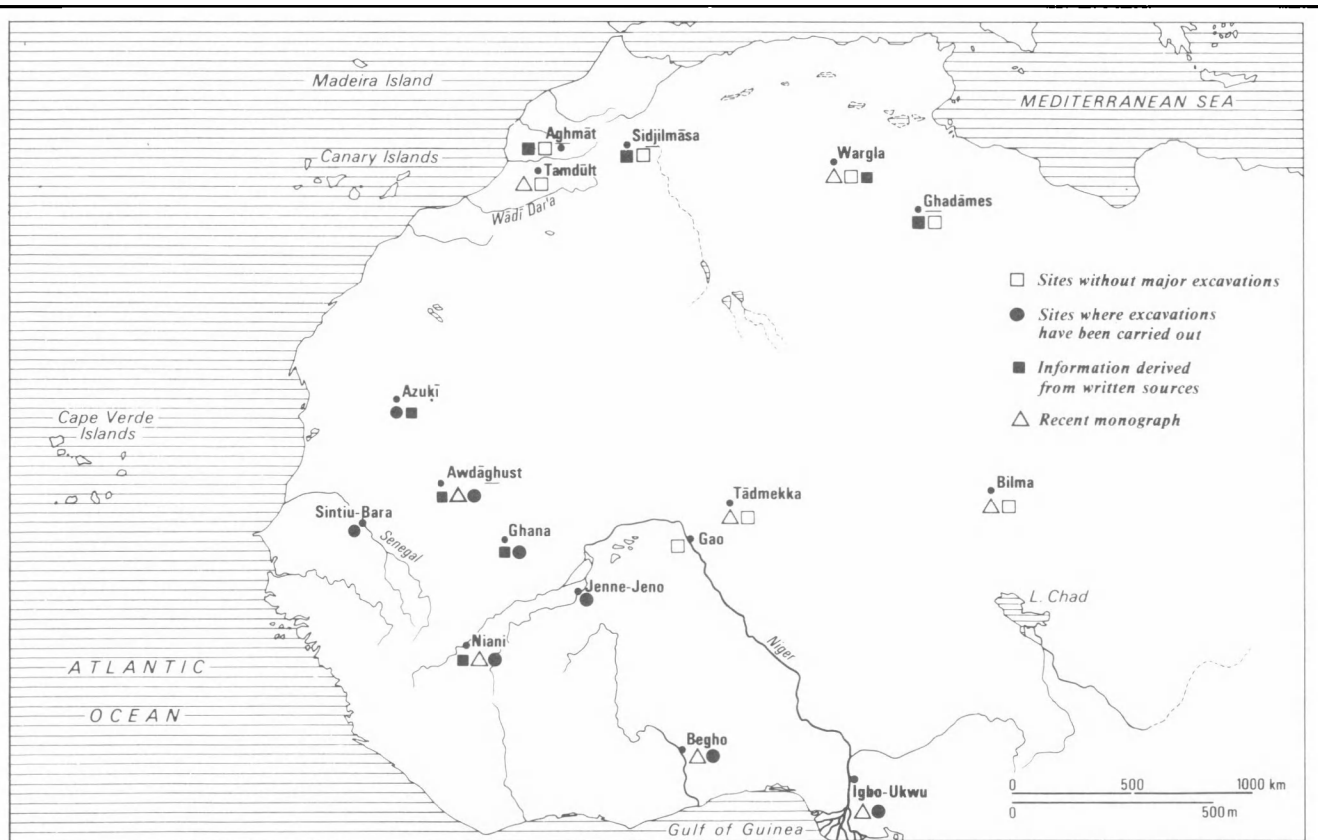
Sintiu-Bara is situated in a historical area of considerable interest, where traces of early life in the towns have been found, but the work done so far does not enable us to connect this site with those mentioned by al-Bakrī and al-Idrīsī. Traces of local metal-working going back to the fifth and sixth centuries have been found there, as well as many traces of high-quality pottery. Hence we should bear in mind what al-Idrīsī said about Takrūr and Barisā, where contacts were made with the merchants from the north.

Niani had a more brilliant life in the following period. However, for the period which concerns us, there are no definite traces of links with the trans-Saharan circuits. Nevertheless, the fact that the town certainly existed and probably traded produce with the neighbouring areas makes one wonder about its possible identification with the Mallal mentioned by al-Bakrī.

Investigations at Jenne-Jeno, based on meticulous stratigraphy and positive datings, is leading to very new findings. Between 400 and 900 a town already existed on this site, near present-day Djenné; and it developed greatly during the following period, from 900 to 1400. Unfortunately, for the moment the results, which are of crucial importance for regional trade, have hardly any bearing on the trans-Saharan links.

Begho has not yet yielded as much evidence or allowed of as many hypotheses. But the mere fact that the earliest traces of activity there go back to the second century shows that it will not be possible for much longer to avoid the question as to whether goods were not moved about in the savanna near the forest earlier than has so far been supposed.

The results obtained here and there by archaeology affect economic history and the history of trans-Saharan trade, and it is a great pity that there is still so little



14.7 Sites of trans-Saharan trade, ninth to eleventh centuries. (J. Devisse)

information about Gao, Tādmekka, Bilma or even Aīr, to say nothing of the towns north of the Sahara.

All the recent research entails making far-reaching adjustments to the history of technological and commercial exchanges for, as a result of its findings, West Africa is no longer seen as a dependency of the north through the medium of trans-Saharan links.

Written sources and archaeology now enable us to draw up a provisional table of the products that crossed the Sahara. Unfortunately, the information given by the Arabic sources and by archaeology do not always, or even often, agree. Al-Bakrī explains that at Awdāghust wheat, dates and raisins were imported at a very high price for a clientele of expatriates from the north, but archaeology has so far provided no confirmation of this. Nevertheless, al-Bakrī opens the way for an important piece of research on the trade in dates, which seem to have crossed the Sahara very early, perhaps even along with information on how to grow them. All the excavation sites show a great increase in the import of semi-luxury (glazed oil lamps) or luxury (cups, vases, glazed perfume-burners and decorated glasses) objects for this same period. For the moment nothing comparable has been found for the same period at the more southerly sites, and Gao, Sintiu-Bara, Niani or Jenne-Jeno cannot be compared with the riches of Tegdaoust. The same is true of glass, which at the same period was imported to Tegdaoust in very varied forms (phials, vases, cups and goblets), but is very rare on the other sites worked so far.

To have a complete picture of this trans-Saharan luxury trade catering for a North African clientele settled in the Sahel, silver must certainly be added to the wheat, dates, raisins, pottery and glass. It also was worked at Tegdaoust, as were probably the precious and semiprecious stones that circulated beyond Awdāghust.

The circulation of precious and semiprecious stones began before 900. It subsequently expanded to keep pace with the demands of a large consumer market, and the provenance of these stones is very instructive.

Real agate, which came from Upper Egypt, was rare. The case of amazonite is more important; although it is not mentioned by the Arab authors, archaeology has yielded many fragments of great interest. The only mines so far identified are a very long way from West Africa, being located north-east of Tibesti and in the Fezzān. In both cases the discovery, in large numbers, of fragments of this beautiful green mineral in West Africa presupposes that there was some way of moving it all the way from the north-east to the west. A recent study has shown that there are small deposits of amazonite in the Tidjikdja area of Mauritania. Garnet came from the Maghrib. A beautifully cut garnet has been found at Tegdaoust. As regards the stone al-Bakrī calls *Tasi-s-Samt*, its description fits chalcedony much better than cornelian and many fragments of chalcedony for the period in question are found at Tegdaoust. As regards the purpose of these stones, for which there was a considerable vogue in West Africa in the tenth and eleventh centuries, they were used for making jewellery by combining metals, stones and shells.

Lastly, mention should perhaps be made of the import of cowries, about whose trans-Saharan history we still know so little. They appeared at Awdāghust in about the ninth-tenth centuries and we begin to have traces of trading in them in the north in the eleventh century.



14.8 Tegdaoust/Awdāghust: imported glass goblet, probably from Ifrīkiya or Egypt (?). (Restoration: Mainz Glass Institute, Federal Republic of Germany.) (IMRS, Nouakchott)

Of course, in the case of Awdāghust, these imported products were brought in, we repeat, for a rich clientele from the north; when this disappeared, after 1100 at the latest, the luxury goods quickly vanished. Awdāghust seems to have been not so much (or only very exceptionally) a redistribution centre for these products imported into the south as a centre for high-value trade between wrought gold and tanned decorated hides, amber from the Atlantic coast, perhaps gum, and the products from the north, of which salt was the only item that could be widely re-exported.

Awdāghust was probably also an important centre of copper metallurgy. It imported raw materials and seems to have made them into quite elaborate alloys and produced luxury goods for local consumption – jewellery and medals – or re-export. Awdāghust may have been the source of the copper wire used as ‘currency’ in Ghana.

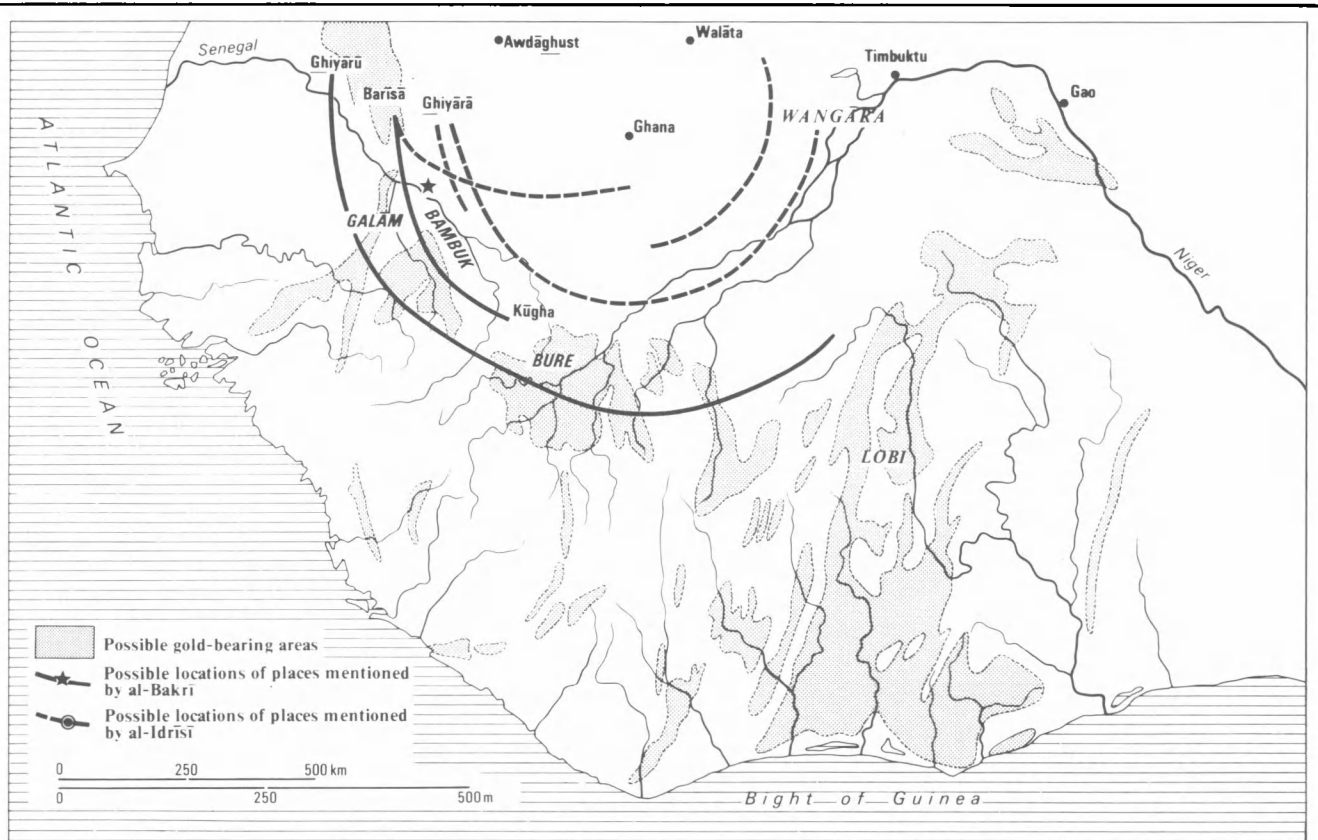
This shows how provisional present conclusions on trans-Saharan trade must necessarily be: it was more changeable, more complex and more contradictory than was thought in the past. We may therefore wonder whether this trade, under cover of the ‘prestige’ salt–gold trade, may not have been changeable and drifting, subject to fashion and the balance of power, and less stable than the texts and the fixed nature of the routes suggest; and also whether it really changed life styles and tastes on both sides of the Sahara.

Let us now come back to the gold trade itself. Al-Bakrī makes explicit references to it in connection with itineraries. The first itinerary went from Ghana to Ghiyārū, crossing first an arm of the ‘Nile’ and then the land of Gharntīl, where Muslims did not live; these had settled a little further west at Yarasnā, where the route ended. The second route went from Ghana to Kūgha in the south-west, where the best gold-mines were. What are we to make of the ‘gold drives’ by Muslim merchants that al-Bakrī’s text suggests, which would have taken these merchants far to the south, into almost direct contact with the mining areas?

For al-Idrīsī a century later, the two main gold trade routes were more clearly organized. The first acted as a link – from towns fairly far to the north such as Takrūr and its dependencies, Barīsā and Sillā – between traders from the north and black merchants who came under Takrūr and travelled around between the towns under its control. Thus there was a black system of trade control – Takrūr – in an area where a century earlier there had been no such thing, even though al-Bakrī already suggested that Sillā was then trying to compete with Ghana. Barīsā, the southerly point of this system, can clearly be located on the upper Senegal, but outside the gold-mining areas.

Al-Idrīsī’s account puts the gold trading centres a long way to the north, and at the same time reduces the area open to prospecting of the Muslim traders who had come to black Africa from the north.

Al-Idrīsī next describes a second gold marketing system dominated by Ghana. The most southerly points of this system were Gharbīl and Ghiyārā; the latter, 11 days’ march from Ghana, lay on an arc running through the Baule, a tributary of the Senegal, and the inland Niger delta. Of the two, it would seem reasonable to prefer the Baule. It seems also that Barīsā and Ghiyārā were the advance posts of the two systems in the direction of the mining areas of Galam and Bambuk. Further east, the Wangara occupied a vast territory in which gold was plentiful; al-Idrīsī’s indications suggest that this area corresponds to the inland Niger delta between its southernmost point near



14.9 Gold production areas in West Africa. (J. Devise)

Bure and the outskirts of Tīrakka, but this was not in the gold-mining area.

Much more work than in the past needs to be done on the black merchants mentioned by the sources, beginning with al-Bakrī. These traders, called the Banū Namghmarāta, were once equated by a copyist with the Wangh.m.rāta, and this gave rise to an important debate, especially since these traders sold gold. The whole question of the Wangara, their location and their economic role will of course one day have to be taken up again. Lastly, we should not forget that, although not named, black traders are reported by al-Bakrī and al-Idrīsī at Gharbīl, Ghiyārā and Barisā, in Tākūr and at Ghana and Gao.

It would be presumptuous to claim to have final solutions for these very difficult arguments. In Ibn Ḥawqal's time, the remote areas where the blacks lived and found gold were given as one month's journey from Ghana. Next time we see this distance shortened, and with al-Idrīsī we reach a solution that looks reasonable. The impression is that the merchants from the north did not have direct access to the gold-mining areas but had contact with black traders. These northern merchants withdrew northwards between the eleventh and the twelfth centuries as the reactions of the Sūdān, Muslim or not, against the pressures exerted on the Sahel area since the tenth century by the merchants from the north became more organized.

Cultural effects of the growth of trans-Saharan trade

As regards tastes and sources of food, hardly anything changed. The north exported at high prices the northern products sought by the 'expatriate' merchants settled south of the desert. As a transportable commodity dates had a more lasting success than wheat.

The Sahara region lived without agriculture, except for oasis gardening. In this area strips of dried camel-meat, camel-milk and wild grasses made up the staple diet of peoples unacquainted with bread and sparing in their use of water. Snake-meat was added in parts where they were common and water was still scarcer. The sources say hardly anything about hunting, although this must have been another major source of food.

Awdāghust formed part of this desert or very arid region, but was an exceptional locality because of its water-table. In the tenth century, two 'class' diets existed side by side: that of the rich, mainly from the north, who ate wheat, dried and locally grown fruit (figs and grapes) and beef and mutton, and that of the poorer people, in this case mainly blacks, who used locally grown durra (millet) made into a dough or into griddle cakes flavoured with honey imported from the south. In the twelfth century, the merchants from the north having left, probably after the Almoravid raid, the town lived mainly on dried camel-meat; in so far as the town survived, it seems to have conformed to the food habits of the surroundings areas.

Westwards across the Senegal and Niger and eastwards in Kawār everything to do with food was completely different. Durra, which was widely grown; rice; fresh, salted or smoked fish; the meat and milk of cattle and more rarely of sheep and goats made up the staple diet. In this millet-growing area, the nutritional heritage

was too long-standing, too well-balanced by practice and too well-adapted to the environment to change.

The three food areas were very distinct and hence quite separate and they remained so at least until the twelfth century, despite the contacts. Thus it is hardly surprising that none of the very important developments in agricultural techniques in the north reached the south, where agricultural methods, well adapted to the environment, had remained unaltered for centuries.

Similarly, the introduction of certain techniques and objects did not lead to their adoption by the southern cultures. Kilns have been found at Tegdaoust capable of reaching and probably exceeding 1000 °C; in morphology they are similar to kilns found at Šabra Maṣūriyya, in Tunisia. They may have something to do with the making of beads or the smelting of copper alloys; they were no doubt used for oft-repeated attempts to produce coloured glazes on pottery, and no similar kilns seem to have been made elsewhere.

The importing of quantities of high-quality oil lamps was followed only by a feeble local imitation. It is uncertain what form of lighting was used in the south.

The arrival of thrown and glazed pottery had an influence that is often apparent on the forms produced locally. But these imported objects did not significantly change the output from local potteries, whose techniques, decorations and shapes went back thousands of years. Apart from the imitation of a few imported shapes and decorations, the pottery-producing area of black Africa remained independent of that in the north. Nor was it the latter that gave the south its keen taste for making anthropomorphic (14.10) and zoomorphic terracotta figurines.

The growth of trans-Saharan links, the strong demand for gold and leather in the north, and the more modest demand for northern products (except salt) in the south probably did not bring about any great changes in the culture or way of life of the peoples of the north or the south until the twelfth century.

These factors were not responsible for major transfers of basic technology – e.g. in the case of metals – either because those transfers took place much earlier or because the south had long since found its own methods of metal production. For copper, which had been worked for at least 1000 years south of the Sahara when the links in question expanded, we now also know that manufacturing techniques – *cire perdue* moulds, leaded bronzes and soldering – were developed south of the desert between the sixth and the eighth centuries.

In three fields, however, transfers – and not only from north to south – were probably genuinely far-reaching and ‘lasting’.

The famous article by J. Schacht long ago showed, in the case of architecture, the impact of Ibāḍite models and their crossing of the desert. These are facts which obviously do not only apply to architecture. It would be dangerous, however, to infer the whole from the part, e.g. that the introduction of plans of mosques meant that all building skills were introduced from the north.

But people still often cling to the idea that architecture as a science was introduced into the Sudan by Mansa Mūsā after his pilgrimage. This is to confuse the building of certain monuments, mosques and places, as well as specifically Muslim town-planning, with the art of organizing living space, which is the beginning of all



14.10 *Tegdaoust/Awdāghust: an unprecedented example of an anthropomorphic statuette (side view) from the pre-Islamic era. The indentations for the hair, eyes and mouth were made with a hollow stalk. The terracotta is coated with an ochre slip. (Photo: copyright Bernard Nantet)*

architecture. Mud architecture is once again becoming the object of attention and serious study. The oldest buildings at Tegdaoust made great use of moulded brick, and walls built of it were to be found on all sides. The art of building with mud and probably with bricks antedates busy trans-Saharan links. The African continent mastered this method of producing an adaptable and convenient material from a very early date.

With Islamization, the Muslim merchants probably brought south of the desert their own designs for houses, and, in any case, the town-planning peculiar to the Islamic city. On the other hand, we may ask whether some technologies did not cross the Sahara from south to north; when the Almoravid palace at Marrakesh was excavated, it was interesting to find a stone wall consisting of two built sections separated by mud rubble. Walls that bear some kinship to this were found at Tegdaoust and it may be asked whether the Almoravids did not use a Saharan or Sahelian technique at Marrakesh. The same applies to the painted decorations on the walls: at Tegdaoust, a red-and-white painted decoration, so far unpatterned, was common in the tenth and eleventh centuries; it was applied on top of a very thin layer of mud. We can link this with the red-and-white patterned decorations found at Marrakesh and Chichāwa, which date from the Almoravid period, and wonder about the source

of the even more celebrated decorations at Walāta and Ḡhadāmes.

Another open problem is the penetration of weaving and cotton south of the Sahara. Although the nakedness of the blacks is continually reported by the texts, this is the result more of the mentality and social background of the editors than of an objective knowledge of the clothing worn by the blacks. For the time being, archaeology gives no definite answers. Spindle-whorls existed at Tegdaoust from the earliest times, but they were only plentiful for periods after the twelfth century. When describing the area of the towns on the Senegal, al-Bakrī says that at Sillā small cotton loin-cloths made at Tirinka were used as money.

Nevertheless, it seems that cotton clothing was still a luxury and a mark of class in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and imports of fabrics from the north continued on a large scale until the twelfth century, but the question is still very open.

As things are at present, the third issue is even more difficult and unsubstantiated than the previous two. The question is whether the sudden appearance of a demand for gold did not, in the tenth century, bring about the transfer of a Muslim system of weighing south of the Sahara.

The presence at Tegdaoust from the earliest times of scales capable of weighing small quantities, the arrival of glass weights at Tegdaoust, Gao and Kumbi Saleh, and probably other forms of weights at other places, prompt us to suggest a cautious but fairly positive reply, namely that the basis of a weighing system probably did follow the demand for gold in the tenth century.

Finally, let us consider what consequences the improvement of trans-Saharan trade had for the states concerned.

In the south, clearly, either because of the conversion to Islam or because of the economic need for a state structure, something took shape (more markedly in Takrūr and Ghana, but probably also in Gao and perhaps elsewhere) which strengthened the position of the rulers and gave them prestige, power and a new legitimacy.

In the north the Fātimids, the Umayyads and especially the Almoravids derived from gold the strength that underpinned their independence and influence. Again, the flowering of an exceptionally brilliant and original art may be attributed to the wealth which gold brought to these dynasties, especially to the latter and more particularly in Morocco. In two centuries the Muslim west acquired an image of considerable importance.

The history of trans-Saharan links is one good pointer, among many others, to the continual renewal of research on Africa. Every discovery entails rearranging the layout of the picture. Copper in Mauritania and Aïr have, in two decades, completely upset a whole series of long-standing patterns. What will happen when serious attention is given to the scope that existed for exporting Bauchi tin in antiquity, or when serious investigation of the landmarks between Chad and the Nile shows that east-west links have been greatly neglected in favour of north-south links?

We have accordingly endeavoured to open up avenues of investigation, to take stock, and to suggest lines of research and topics for consideration rather than to paint a satisfactory 'final' picture of this question. For decades to come, the record of this history will have to be regularly dismantled and put together again in the light of research that is still only at the threshold of the revelations it is destined to produce.

15

The Chad region as a crossroads

The Lake Chad region, which consists of savanna-land, has been inhabited by pastoral and agricultural peoples since before the Christian era. To the north, where the savanna gradually merges into desert, nomad peoples predominate, while to the south, especially along the banks of the rivers that flow into Lake Chad, mainly sedentary cultures are to be found. The drying out of the Sahara and the depletion of Lake Chad drew peoples from various directions towards its diminishing bed. The coming together of peoples from various critical areas and attempts by the population to adjust to the changing environment and circumstances form the background to the history of the area.

It cannot be taken for granted that the Lake Chad region was always a crossroads for trade and mutually rewarding interactions. The dates currently available for the spread of iron-working techniques suggest that some populations in the region long remained cut off from the major innovatory trends. The main divide in this regard would seem to be between west and east rather than between north and south. To the south of Aïr, at Ekne Wan Aparan, iron-smelting techniques were known as early as 540 ± 90 before the Christian era. Elsewhere, such iron-working techniques were adopted much later. At Koro Toro, between Lake Chad and Tibesti, the vestiges of a culture based on iron metallurgy have been discovered. Known as *haddād* after the Arabic term for 'blacksmith', this culture flourished only between the fourth and eighth centuries of the Christian era. According to relatively unreliable datings, iron was not to be found on the major site of Daima until the fifth or sixth century of the Christian era, and it was later still before iron-smelting techniques were adopted. These few indications show that, prior to the foundation of Kānem, the Lake Chad region was remarkable more for its divisions and unequal levels of development than for any unifying factor.

A process of more rapid and spectacular changes appears to have begun around the middle of the first millennium of the Christian era. It was triggered off indirectly by the introduction of the camel into the area either from North Africa or – as seems more probable – from the Nile valley, and its adoption by the Zaghāwa and the Tubu.

Between the Fezzān and the Lake Chad region, the natural conditions were particularly propitious for crossing the Sahara: a whole series of small oases and natural water-holes and, midway, the vast oasis of the Kawār provided an ideal caravan route.

Another opportunity for commerce was with the Nile valley through Dārfūr and Kordofān and it would seem that, in the earlier period, this trade was more important. On the other hand, the existence of the ancient kingdom of the Garamantes in the Fezzān was undoubtedly a major factor in the organization of long-distance trade along the north-south axis.

As early as the seventh century, the central Saharan route was plied by small caravans from the Fezzān, since the celebrated Arab conqueror 'Uḳba b. Nāfi' would have found it difficult to penetrate as far as Kawār, had the trail not been blazed before him by some – either Berber or Zaghāwa – traders. In later times, the central Saharan route became more important, following the establishment of regular trade between the Lake Chad area and the Mediterranean coast due to the Islamic conquests and the rise of Muslim states in North Africa and later in the Sahara.

In the south, around Lake Chad, a whole series of factors, including development of better weapons and tools and the evolution of new ways of dealing with these changing circumstances, were to lead to the foundation and expansion of a vast political entity, Kānem-Bornu.

Peoples and languages of the Chad region

Before Ibn Sa'īd (thirteenth century), most Arab geographers mention the Zaghāwa people when referring to the central Sudan (an expression used here as synonymous with the Chad region). Until the tenth century, Arab authors suggest that the Zaghāwa held sway over Kānem; however, al-Idrīsī, writing in the twelfth century, gives particulars that bring out their purely nomadic nature. Modern authors have frequently played down the role of the Zaghāwa, either regarding them as a marginal group or, on the contrary, supposing them to be an extremely extensive group, identical to the present-day Tubu.

The main internal source, the *Diwān salāfīn Barnū*, contains an ethnic nomenclature that cannot be checked against external sources. The chroniclers of the royal court took pains to indicate the names of the ethnic groups from which the successive queen-mothers had originated. We know that the kings of Kānem married women of the Tomaghra, the Kay and the Tubu. The traditions recorded in the *Diwān* refer to the successive matrimonial alliances between the kings of Kānem and the various nomadic groups whose martial prowess the earlier kings found useful in sustaining their powers.

Further to the east, between the Zaghāwa and the Nūba, al-Idrīsī situates the Tād̲j̲ū, whose existence, probably already dating back to the remote past, seems to have been overlooked by earlier authors. According to oral traditions, the Dād̲j̲o – probably identical with the Tād̲j̲ū – gave rise to the first development of Dārfūr as a state structure. In the thirteenth century, they appear to have been under pressure from the Zaghāwa who, having been excluded from power in Kānem, apparently sought to re-establish a coherent political entity at the southern extremity of the great trans-Saharan route linking the Dārfūr region to Egypt. In fact, the Dād̲j̲o surrendered power not to the Zaghāwa but to the Tundjur, resisting assimilation only by withdrawing into areas of refuge. The Zaghāwa, by contrast, were able to preserve their

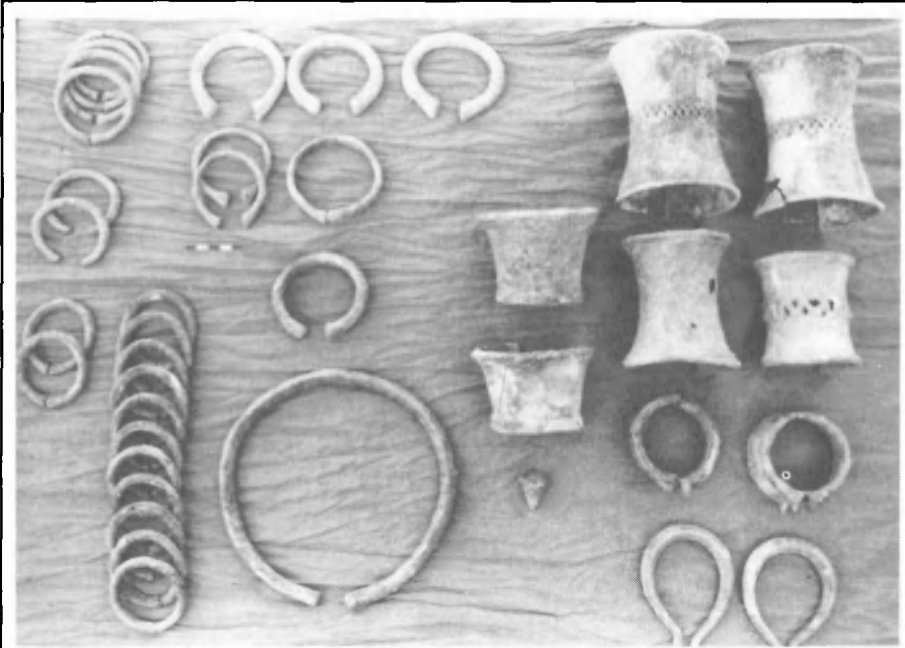
ethnic cohesion, despite the fact that their grazing area had been considerably reduced by the expansion of the Teda-Daza (Tubu).

At the time of Dūnama Dībalāmi (1210–48), the Kānem people had not yet driven the ancestors of the Buduma back to the Lake Chad islands, and it is reasonable to suppose that the area inhabited by the Kotoko extended beyond the clay lands (*firki*) of the alluvial plain formed by the lower Chari. The Komadugu Yobe valley was still settled by Bede communities (later assimilated by the Kanuri or driven back on to the territory of the Ngizim); on the other side of Lake Chad, the Kurī (today assimilated to the Buduma) still inhabited the *terra firma* to the north of the entrance to the Baḥr al-Ghazāl. South of the lake lived the Kotoko, under a name that appears to belong to Kānembu nomenclature. In all these regions, the Kānembu were therefore already a people of consequence in the thirteenth century, and it can readily be accepted that in earlier times the area inhabited by Chadic-speaking peoples extended over a large part of Kānem and Bornu.

South of Lake Chad, the Kānembu came into contact with an ancient civilization outstanding for its remarkable figurative art. The inhabitants of the *firki* plains engaged in a mixed economy for an initial period before the Christian era, when agriculture was practised alongside stock-breeding and fishing. The second period, commencing at the beginning of the Christian era, was marked by the introduction of iron-working techniques. This major innovation had a direct impact on productivity and the process of sedentarization: the intensification of agricultural activities was to relegate other activities – such as animal husbandry and fishing – to the background. The emergence during the second period of mudbrick architecture reveals that these people had adopted a sedentary way of life. During the third period, extending from c. +700 to c. +1050, the inhabitants of the *firki* plains began to enjoy a life of less austerity: various artefacts deriving from long-distance trade make their appearance for the first time, and vestiges are to be found of a weaving industry (long before Islam). Daima potters began to make extremely large earthenware jars, which are today regarded by the inhabitants of the region as the distinctive sign of the ‘Sao’. Another major innovation concerned fortifications. The advent of fortifications was the first sign of an external threat that was later to have a marked effect on the lives of the farmers of the Chari plain. This threat may be fairly readily identified as being due to the expansion of the Kānem peoples.

The present-day inhabitants of the *firki* plains, the Kotoko, use the term *Sao* or *Soo* to refer to their ancestors. The same term recurs in every region in which the Kānem peoples have superseded earlier populations and was used to denote the indigenous populations who were unable to resist assimilation. The expression ‘Sao civilization’ must therefore have applied both to the relatively well-known culture of the Kotoko ancestors – corresponding to its established present-day use – and to the earlier cultures of the Komadugu Yobe and the southern part of the Baḥr al-Ghazāl.

Comparative linguistics provides a number of pointers of considerable interest. It is acknowledged today that Chad languages constitute a branch of the great Afro-Asian family. The coherence of the Chad group is doubtless to be explained by a lengthy evolution of the proto-languages in a geographical environment conducive to linguistic contacts and exchanges. At the beginning of the third millennium before the Christian era, living conditions began to deteriorate rapidly, and it is possible that



15.1 Bronze objects from excavations at Houlouf (North Cameroon). (A. Holl)

the proto-Chadic-speaking peoples were already obliged at that time to withdraw into more southerly regions. As they entered into contact with black African groups, they must gradually have lost their Sudano-Mediterranean characteristics. Today, the various groups of Chad-speakers are to be found settled between the Niger and the Wadai plateau. Of these groups, only the Hausa have developed a new drive, resulting in renewed expansion of their language.

The second major language family of the Chad region is the Nilo-Saharan family. The most westerly language of this group is Songhay, which is spoken all along the Niger river, from Jenne to Gaya. The second subgroup of the Nilo-Saharan family consists of Saharan languages (Zaghāwa, Teda-Daza and Kānembu-Kanuri). Today, all contact between Songhay and Saharan languages has ceased; however, the many lexicographical forms common to the two language groups suggest that Sudanese herdsmen (and probably also farmers) speaking Nilo-Saharan languages occupied a large part of the region between the great bend of the Niger and the Ennedi mountains. The geographical continuity of this process of settlement must have been broken by the combined effect of the desertification of the Sahara and the advance of the Libyco-Berbers during the last centuries before the Christian era. To the east, the proto-Songhay-speaking peoples were to initiate the founding of the Kāw-Kāw (Gao), while in the Lake Chad region the proto-Saharan-speaking peoples imposed their sway over Kānem.

The kingdom of Zaghāwa

The first mention of Kānem in written sources is to be found in a text by al-Ya'qūbī dated 872. At the end of the tenth century, al-Muhallabī gives a great deal of information about the king of the Zaghāwa, from which it is clear that the boundaries of his realm were the same as those of the kingdom of Kānem. Zaghāwa rule over Kānem only came to an end around 1075, when a new dynasty, the Sēfuwa, came to power and drove the Zaghāwa eastwards into a region where they are still to be found today.

Al-Ya'qūbī states that the various West African peoples he knew of 'took possession of their realms' after a long east-west migration: 'The first of their realms is that of the Zaghāwa. They established themselves at a place called Kānem. Their dwellings are reed huts, and they have no towns. Their King is called Kākura. Among the Zaghāwa there is a clan called Ḥawḍīn: they have a Zaghāwa King.' The text seems to indicate that the Zaghāwa were among the earliest inhabitants of Kānem, but this is quite unlikely. The reference to the Ḥawḍīn¹ as being a particular clan among the Zaghāwa shows that the Zaghāwa were far from being a homogeneous people.

It seems probable that a dominant aristocracy, which produced both the king of Kānem and the king of the Ḥawḍīn, gave its name to the whole group of peoples settled in both countries.

It is unlikely that Kānem was founded as the result of a massive invasion by allogeneous migrants, as some writers have suggested. The most plausible hypothesis is that a small group of people triggered off a particularly violent conflict in a region where iron-working techniques had been known since the fourth century of the Christian era (*Haddād* culture) and where the possession of horses was not only the mark of greater prestige but also a guarantee of superior fighting power. Equipped with weapons made of iron, this group – doubtlessly the Zaghāwa – gradually brought under its sway the agricultural and pastoral peoples living in the region south-east of Kawār, between Lake Chad and the Bahr al-Ghazāl – the region later to be known as Kānem. The dominant Zaghāwa aristocracy is not likely to have come into being until later although, according to this hypothesis, the Zaghāwa as a whole may not have been ethnically different from the major groups of cultivators and pastoralists over whom they ruled at first. Thus it is more natural to explain the emergence of the Zaghāwa by the birth and growth of the state of Kānem than to postulate that an earlier ethnic group of Zaghāwa, homogeneous and distinct from the other groups in the region, conquered all the indigenous communities and thereby brought into being the first and largest state to be founded between the Nile and the Niger.

The earliest mention of the Zaghāwa, which we owe to Wāḥb b. Munabbih, indicates that a state of Kānem was already in existence in his time (about 730). In addition to the Zaghāwa, the text mentions the Nuba, the Zandj, the Fezzān, the Ḥabaṣha, the Copts and the Berbers. According to this early piece of evidence, the Zaghāwa were differentiated both from the Fezzān (the successors of the Garamantes) and from the Berbers. All the evidence goes to show that under the concept of Zaghāwa and that of Kānem there lies, in reality, one and the same historical fact: the first mention of the Zaghāwa, dating from the beginning of the eighth century, certainly

1. It is possible, as suggested also by other modern writers, that this name refers to the Hausa

seems to indicate that the large state at the southern end of the central Saharan route was already in existence then. We can date the beginning of the state of Kānem slightly before the *hiḍra*, i.e. at the beginning of the seventh century. The expedition to Kawār undertaken by 'Ukba b. Nafi' in the early days of the Arab conquest shows the importance of north-south exchanges in this region. The control of these exchanges was no doubt in the hands of a Sudanic state beyond the Arabs' range.

Some authors have taken the view that the Sao were the indigenous inhabitants of Kānem, who lived in village communities – or even small fortified towns – and had been organized into chieftaincies since time immemorial. After their subjugation by the Zaghāwa nomads, the latter had learned from them the forms of political organization which made it possible to establish a large-scale state.

None of the assumptions underlying this theory of the foundation of Kānem rests on solid ground. The Sao appear in written sources for the first time in the middle of the fourteenth century (*Dīwān*) and they are mentioned by various sixteenth-century authors: at that time the term 'Sao' was used for a group of peoples established to the east and south-east of Lake Chad and probably speaking Chad languages. It was only during their long resistance to the expansion of Kānem-Bornu that these peoples developed the forms of political and social organization that gave them their distinctive character.

There is no reason to assume that a sharp division existed, particularly as regards ethnic characteristics, between nomads and sedentary peoples, or between indigenous and alien peoples, at the time of ancient Kānem. On the contrary, there may be a certain degree of cultural affinity between the sedentary and nomad group – such as still exists to this day between the sedentary Kānembu and the nomadic Tubu and Daza – and, if we accept this, it will be easier to understand how an aristocracy like that of the Zaghāwa could have come to dominate the rest of the population without the division between two groups of peoples becoming particularly apparent to later foreign observers. Al-Muhallabī's account suggests peaceful coexistence between cultivators and herdsmen, the power to take coercive action being apparently confined to the king. The kingdom of the Zaghāwa is not portrayed as an entirely homogeneous whole. On the contrary, the author states at the outset that it comprises 'many nations [*umam*]', which clearly suggests the coexistence of different ethnic groups within a single state structure. At the end of the tenth century, the kingdom of Zaghāwa evidently expanded considerably, and was no longer confined to the region inhabited by kindred peoples speaking Saharan languages: Kānem proper, lying between Lake Chad and the Baḥr al-Ghazāl, was still the centre of the kingdom, but other peoples on the periphery had been brought under its sway. It is undeniable that, from that time on, the largest state in the central Sudan contributed greatly to the expansion of the Saharan languages and the cultural assimilation of neighbouring peoples.

Another important development that took place at this time was an increase in the number of sedentary communities, together with the founding of small towns. Al-Muhallabī gives the names of two towns, Mānān and Tarāzakī. The town of Mānān is also known to us from the *Dīwān*, and Ibn Sa'īd stated that it was the capital of the 'pagan ancestors' of the Sēfuwa. But it was not until the first half of the thirteenth century that sedentary elements finally gained the upper hand. This development went hand in hand with the progress of Islamization.

The progress of Islamization

It is well established that Islam played no part in the founding of Kānem or in the early stages of its development. In Kawār at the northern extremity of the central Sudan, Islam made a fleeting appearance with the expedition led by 'Uḡbā b. Nafī', but it probably did not leave a deep impression. It was only in the eighth century, when the Berbers of the Fezzān and Kawār were converted in large numbers, that Islam began to reach more southerly regions.

Like many Berber peoples, the inhabitants of the Fezzān initially adopted a heterodox form of Islam, the Ibāḍiyya, thus allying themselves with the Khāridjite faction, and it is quite likely that the earliest form of Islam propagated south of the Sahara by Berber traders was, in fact, the Ibāḍiyya.

In the Fezzān, the situation changed at the beginning of the tenth century, when the new dynasty of the Banū Khaṭṭāb came to power: after that event, Arab geographers ceased to mention the heterodox beliefs of the Berbers of the Fezzān and it is very probable that the political change brought with it a change in religious trend.

Already in the second half of the ninth century, Kawār was inhabited by Berbers, whose main occupation seems to have been slave-trading. The other peoples living there were probably Sudanic; even at that early date they may have been the Tubu, who nowadays live there alongside the Kanuri. Most of the slaves whom the Berber traders of Kawār brought to the Fezzān no doubt came from Kānem, where the king of the Zaghāwa 'reduced to slavery those among his subjects whom he wished'.

At that time, however, the kings of Kānem already seem to have established diplomatic relations with the Muslim states of North Africa. The available sources yield the following information: in 992 Ibn Khaṭṭāb, governor of Zawila, received a present from one of the countries of the *biṭāḍ al-Sūdān* whose name is not specified, but which, in view of the geographical position of Zawila, it is reasonable to suppose was Kānem; in the same year, the Zīrīd sultan of Ifrikiya, al-Manṣūr (984–96), likewise received a gift dispatched by a country of the *biṭāḍ al-Sūdān*, the name of which is not stated. In 1031 one of his successors, al Mu'izz (1016–62) received a present of slaves sent by a *malik al-Sūdān*. As regards a later period, Ibn Khaldūn tells us that the kings of Kānem were in touch with the Ḥafṣid dynasty (1228–1347) from the time of its foundation, and he reports in particular that in 1257 'the King of Kānem and Lord of Bornu' sent the Ḥafṣid Sultan al-Mustaṣir (1249–77) a giraffe, which caused a great stir in Tunis. There is nothing surprising about the fact that the king, who was one of the large suppliers of slaves and had some sort of monopoly over their acquisition in his own country, should have courted the goodwill of his principal customers.

Trade relations with the countries of North Africa and frequent contacts with Muslim merchants could not have gone on for long without enabling Islam to make considerable progress in court circles and certain sections of the population. It would probably be a mistake to visualize the progressive Islamization of Kānem as an uninterrupted growth process: it would be strange if the king and the Zaghāwa aristocracy had not tried to curb a movement that threatened to undermine the economic order on which their power was at least partially founded. According to the *Diwān*, Arkū b. Būlū (c. 1023–67), one of the last Zaghāwa kings, established colonies of slaves in several of the Kawār oases and even at Zaylā in the southern Fezzān – a region

which today forms part of Libya. It is quite understandable that Arkū b. Būlū should have felt impelled to extend his sway over the Berber communities of Kawār in order the better to control both their trading activities and their religious proselytizing. We know that, at the same period, the king of Ghana was extending his authority over the important trading centre of Awdāghust, and the conjunction of these developments may not be fortuitous.

Arkū's successor was the first Muslim king of Kānem. His name is given in the *Dīwān* in three different forms: Ladsū, Sū (or Sawā) and Ḥū (or Ḥawwā') – the correct form no doubt being Ḥū (or Ḥawwā'). The authors of the *Dīwān*, reporting the crucial event in the history of the Chad region, which was the accession to power of a Muslim sovereign in the kingdom of Kānem, were content with an extremely brief note: 'he was invested by the Caliph' (*Dīwān*, 10). Neither this manner of investiture nor the unorthodox form of the first Muslim king's name admits of the hypothesis of a conversion. On the contrary, it is very likely that, after Arkū's death (at Zaylā'), the pro-Muslim faction within the old dynasty put forward the strongest candidate it could find. In the absence of other evidence, we cannot dismiss the possibility that Ḥū (or Ḥawwā') was in reality – as certain pointers suggest – a woman bearing the very Muslim name of Ḥawwā'. He (or she) reigned for only four years, and was succeeded by 'Abd al-Djalīl, whose reign likewise lasted four years. The next king, Hummay, was the first of a new dynasty, the Sēfuwa. The very short reigns of Ḥū or Ḥawwā' (c. 1067–71) and 'Abd al-Djalīl (c. 1071–5) stand in contrast with the long reigns of their predecessors and may be interpreted as a sign of a serious crisis: after a long period of incubation, when the crucial stage was reached in the growing power of Islam, the Muslims first undermined the stability of the old regime and then brought about a drastic political change.

The advent of the Sēfuwa

By an extraordinary coincidence, the dynastic change that occurred in Kānem around the year 1075 is not reported clearly in any of the available sources. At the end of the paragraph which the *Dīwān* devoted to 'Abd al-Djalīl, there is a curious passage whose real meaning has escaped most historians: 'That is what we have written about the history of the Banū Dūkū; we shall now proceed to set down the history of the Banū Hummay, who professed Islam.' This remark has been taken to refer solely to the adoption of Islam – and not to a dynastic change – since the authors of the *Dīwān* indicate in a later passage that the next king, Hummay, was the son of 'Abd al-Djalīl. We have seen above, however, that Ḥū (or Ḥawwā') was already a Muslim, as was his (or her) successor, 'Abd al-Djalīl, and this could not have escaped the notice of the chroniclers. Hence the passage just quoted must relate to something other than the introduction of Islam.

It is a fourteenth-century author, Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī, who established the time sequence of events: 'The first to establish Islam [in Kānem] was al-Hādī al-'Uḥmānī, who claimed to be one of the descendants of 'Uḥmān b. 'Affān. After him [Kānem] fell to the Yazaniyyūn of the Banī Dhī Yazan.' The Yazaniyyūn to whom al-'Umarī refers are, in fact, none other than the Sēfuwa, whose name is derived from

that of Sayf b. Dhī Yazan. The author says in so many words that the accession to power of the Sēfuwa was preceded by the introduction of Islam.

The antiquity of the tradition that tends to conceal the dynastic change by putting the emphasis on the adoption of Islam is attested by Ibn Sa'īd, who provides the earliest evidence of the existence in Kānem of a dynasty claiming descent from Sayf b. Dhī Yazan:

The Sultan of Kānem . . . is Muḥammad b. Djīl of the line of Sayf b. Dhī Yazan. The capital of his infidel ancestors, before they were converted to Islam, was Mānān; then one of them, his great-great-great-great grand-father, became a Muslim under the influence of a jurist, after which Islam spread throughout the land of Kānem.

The great-great-great-great grandfather of Muḥammad b. Djīl (= Dūnama Dībalāmi) was in fact Ḥummay (c. 1075–86) and he, as we have seen, was by no means the first Muslim king of Kānem, still less a new convert. The only point in this passage that directly relates to the dynastic change is the change of capital: first Mānān, then Ndjīmī.

Another Arab geographer, al-Bakrī, writing in 1067–8, gives us a *terminus a quo* both for the introduction of Islam into Kānem and for the change of dynasty: '[The inhabitants of Kānem] are idolatrous Sūdān. It is said that there exists in those parts a clan descended from the Umayyads, who took refuge there when they were persecuted by the Abbāsids. They dress in the fashion of the Arabs and follow their customs.' We do not know for certain to what period this information relates, but it cannot be later than 1067–8. According to the chronology which emerges from the *Dīwān*, that was in fact the very year in which the first Muslim king, who was still a member of the old Zaghāwa dynasty, came to power in the kingdom of Kānem. As for the 'descendants of the Umayyads' who 'dressed in the fashion of the Arabs' and who therefore were not Arabs, they must presumably have been a group of Berbers who had adopted certain Arab customs. This group may quite possibly have been one of the forces that were later to contribute to the success of the pro-Muslim faction within the old dynasty before they brought about the downfall of that dynasty.

It emerges from the mass of information provided by al-Idrīsī (who wrote in 1154) that, in his day, 'Kānem' and 'Zaghāwa' were two separate entities. The Zaghāwa no longer ruled over Kānem: having lost their ancient privileges, they were apparently living in quite wretched conditions. Most of them seem to have been nomads. The towns of Mānān and Ndjīmī are both mentioned, and Mānān seems to have been the more important one, but it is not clear whether it was the capital of Kānem. No information is given about the religious situation.

It will be deduced from what has gone before that the dynastic change and the coming to power of the Yazaniyyūn have taken place between al-Bakrī's time (1067–8) and al-Idrīsī's (1154). The dynastic change is then seen to coincide with the expulsion of the Zaghāwa from Kānem. An analysis of the *Dīwān* narrows the range of dates for this event, which is of crucial importance for the history of the central Sudan down to the beginning of Ḥummay's reign (c. 1075–86) for his predecessor, 'Abd al-Djalīl, was the last king of the *Banū-Dūkū* line and Ḥummay was to be the first of

the *Banū Ḥummay* line. The distinction drawn between these two royal houses thus signifies that there was a sharp break in dynastic continuity; it does not coincide with the introduction of Islam.

Who were the new rulers of Kānem? The *Dīwān* provides no answer to this question: while linking Ḥummay genealogically with his predecessor, its authors are silent about his true paternal ancestry. However, the traditions of Kānem and Bornu, which have been committed to writing in recent times, say generally that the new dynasty was descended from Sayf b. Dhī Yazan.

We know that it was during the rule of Ḥummay or of his successors that the Sayfid *niṣba* was introduced. Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan was a Yemenite hero who, according to legend, helped to drive the Ethiopians out of the Yemen in the second half of the sixth century of the Christian era. And it is known that the Berbers of North Africa liked to claim Yemenite descent in order to differentiate themselves from the Adnanite Arabs of the Nadjd and the Hidjāz. This attitude was the equivalent in the genealogical field of the adoption of the Khāridjite heterodoxy in religious matters.

That those who introduced this strange genealogical concept into the black Africa environment of the central Sudan were Berbers cannot be doubted. They could not have been either Sudanese or Arabs, both of whom had highly respectable genealogies, whereas, on the other hand, the Berbers were proud of their Himyarite Yemeni origin. The Berber Muslim clerics who elaborated the Sayfid *niṣba* were doubtlessly attracted also by the similarity in meaning or usage between 'Kānem', meaning south of Teda-Daza, and 'Yemen', often used colloquially to mean south.

All that can be said here is that the Sēfuwa appear to have been of different genealogy from their Zaghāwa predecessors and that their coming to power was not connected with the introduction of Islam, since Ḥummay was not the first Muslim ruler of Kānem. Although there is no concrete evidence to show that the Sēfuwa were not of local origin, equally there is none to say convincingly that they were.

It has been shown that the Islamization of the central Sudan started with the conversion of the inhabitants of Kawār, who later became the main agents of the expansion of Islam into the kingdom of the Zaghāwa. In Ḥummay's time (1075–86), the gradual infiltration of Islam into the various sections of the population had been going on for at least two centuries. The political authorities eventually found that they could not remain indifferent to this process, for it was bound to undermine the king's absolute power over his subjects and, at the same time, help to weaken the position of the Zaghāwa aristocracy.

But, at the end of the eleventh century, Islam was still restricted to the narrow circles of the royal court and the aristocracy, and it was only much later, at the time of Dūnama Dībalāmi (c. 1210–48), when it became the instrument of an expansionist policy, that it was able to bridge the gap separating the ruling aristocracy from the ruled peoples and thereby to become a truly popular religion.

16

The Guinea zone: general situation

Introduction

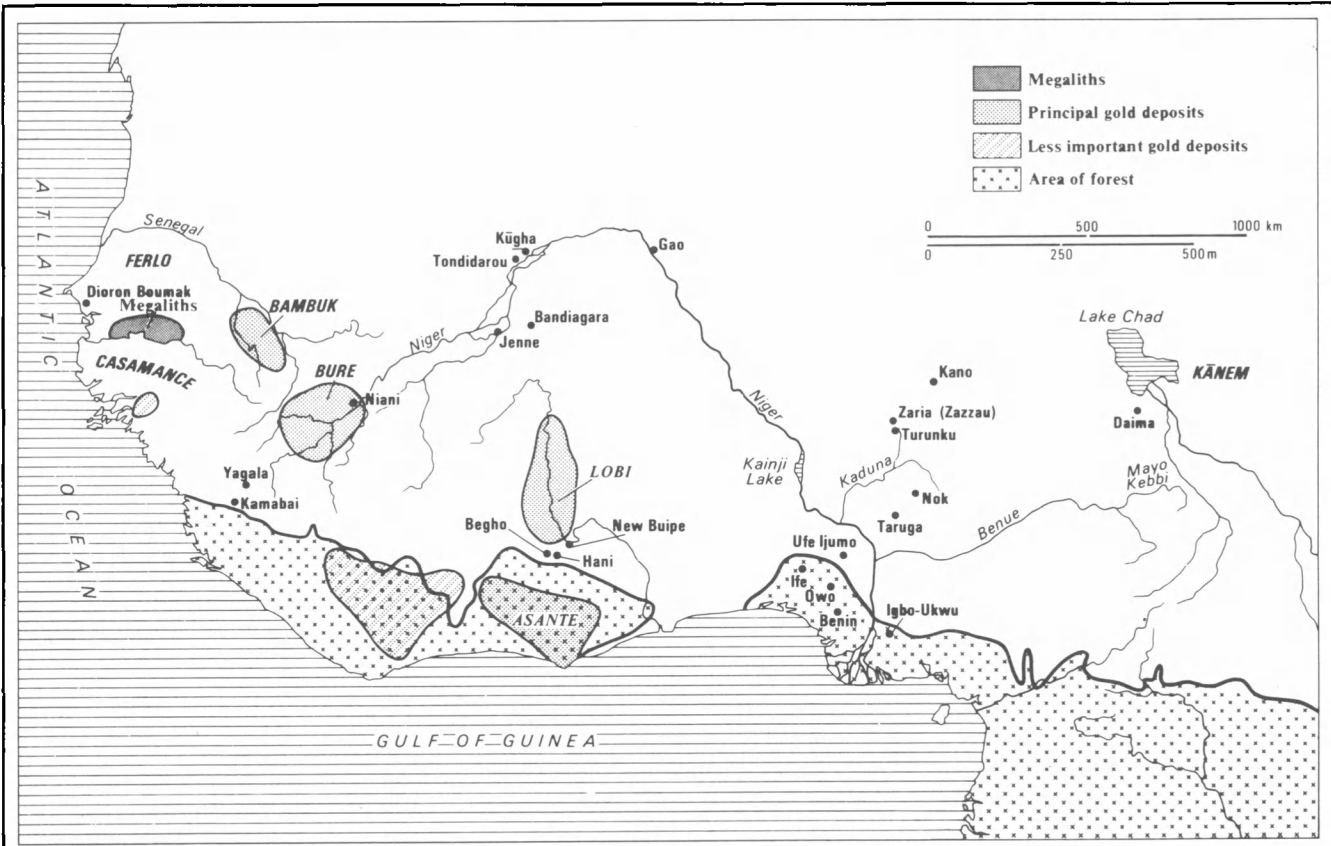
Thurstan Shaw once characterized the thousand years before +1000 in West Africa as 'the silent millennium'.¹ He pointed out how serious for our knowledge of history this silence is, since it must have contained the formative periods essential for the subsequent emergence of those kingdoms and religious centres whose existence we can perceive at the end of the millennium or at the beginning of the next. In the succeeding centuries not only do we begin to get historical records but the association of works of art with centralized social and political institutions has attracted the attention of both archaeologists and art historians. However, we must try to put together as much of the picture as we can; sometimes this may involve merely recording the data we have without being able to interpret them clearly or synthesize them into any more general scheme of things.

The expansion of agriculture

Early developments

The change in the way of life that is of fundamental importance for our period is the change from one whose subsistence base was in hunting, gathering and fishing to one in which it depended upon agriculture and stock-raising. We should not think of it as a sharp break with the past, as a totally new practice suddenly imported into the area. There are likely to have been many 'degrees' of agriculture and food production; initially the earliest planned seed-sowing of indigenous African cereals south of the Sahara may simply have been a rather desperate device by sedentary or semi-sedentary fisherfolk during a period of increasing aridity. With a reduction of fishable areas of water available to them, a greater proportion than before of the food supply may have been derived from wild-grown grain, but at the same time the stands of wild grasses would have become thinner and thinner and further to seek. The logical adaptation was to make the wild grass grow more abundantly and nearer the home base, by planting seeds near the dwindling lakes and rivers. At first, this artificial planting

1. See Chapter 24 of Volume I.



16.1 The Guinea zone: places mentioned in the text. (T. Shaw)

was regarded as a temporary expedient, but as time went on more and more reliance had to be placed on it. Once man had consistently taken a hand in propagating the cereal grasses, genetic changes began to take place in them. This resulted in the process of 'domestication' and in improving them for purposes of human cultivation, harvesting and consumption.

Another example is provided by the most important tree crop of the Guinea zone – the oil-palm. There are only small steps between gathering wild nuts fallen from a tree; taking measures to prevent wild animals consuming all the fallen nuts; climbing the tree to obtain the complete cluster of nuts; giving some protection to natural palm seedlings against wild animals, bush fires or weeds; the assigning of proprietary rights for individuals or families in certain trees or areas of trees; and finally the intentional planting of palm-nuts. Thus the change need not be a sudden one, yet somewhere along the line a change has occurred from gathering the fruits of the wild to planned food production.

Crops

The most important cereals in the savanna were bulrush millet (*Pennisetum americanum*), Guinea corn (*Sorghum bicolor*), and two kinds of 'fonio' or 'hungry rice' (*Digitaria exilis* and *D. iburua*). In the Futa Jallon, a wild grass (*Brachiaria deflexa*) had been domesticated and African rice (*Oryza glaberrima*) was dominant in the western part of the Guinea zone. In the southern savanna and the forests of the eastern part, the domesticated African yams formed the staple, especially *Dioscorea cayanensis* and *D. rotundata*. It is possible that the combination of food derived from yams and oil-palms, supplemented by proteins from fish, goats, dwarf cattle and bush-meat (including snails), helps to explain the build-up of population in southern Nigeria.

Diseases

By the seventh century also, the incidence of sickle-cell gene would have built up to levels to provide the population with considerable protection against malaria; initially the introduction of agricultural methods and ways of life increased the incidence of malaria. The conditions produced by clearing areas in the forest for agriculture favoured the disease: the open water-holes and domestic rubbish (such as discarded calabashes) of an agricultural village provide ideal breeding-grounds for mosquitoes; and the roofs and eaves of thatched huts furnish dark lurking grounds for them during the daytime. We do not know precisely when or how the sickle-cell gene mutation took place. If a child receives it from both parents he will die, before reaching reproductive age, of sickle-cell disease; if he receives it from neither parent he runs a high risk of dying of malaria before reaching maturity; if, however, he receives it from only one parent, he will not die of sickle-cell disease and he is provided with a large measure of protection against malaria. Where the incidence of sickle-cell is high in the population, this is always in areas of endemic malaria. It has been calculated that it must have taken at least 1500 years to build up to the levels recorded in north-eastern Nigeria; the build-up is probably slower in less humid areas.

Types of farming and of settlement

What, then, we can envisage at the beginning of our period is a widespread population of village farmers. In some cases, the population density and the ecology of the area were such that permanent settlements were possible, persisting over many generations; in other areas, the food requirements of a community reached a point where it was more economical of labour for a village to move into an unfarmed area, or one not recently farmed; thus the common long-fallowing system was developed. Where villages remained on one spot for generations and mud houses were rebuilt on the remains of their predecessors every ten to twenty years, the level of the village rose above the surrounding ground and created a mound. Such mounds are coming to be recognized by archaeologists and a few have been excavated, but there is a limit to the amount of information that can be obtained by the excavation of a single site.

The other type of village site much more easily escapes notice; it can only be recognized by a surface scatter of potsherds, whereas under vegetation it is undetectable. This is why we know less about early transient farming villages than we do about sites occupied by the hunters and gatherers of the Late Stone Age, who had a habit of frequently returning to rock shelters and rock overhangs. Such caves and rock shelters were often utilized temporarily by the later, iron-using agriculturists, for refuges or convenient lodging places during farming activities, but were seldom developed as permanent occupation sites. An exception to this is provided by the Tellem caves of the Bandiagara scarp in Mali, where archaeological and skeletal material from the caves has been intensively studied. The present Dogon people of the area attribute the remains in the caves to the 'Tellem'. Radio-carbon dates indicate that the 'Tellem' occupation of the caves only began at the very end of our period and lasted two or three centuries. The 'Tellem' were formerly supposed to have migrated to the east into what is now Burkina Faso and to have been ancestral to the present Kurumba there. However, studies of the physical anthropology of the Kurumba and of the Tellem skeletons indicate that they are genetically different.

The expansion of metallurgy

In some parts of the area, iron-smelting had been practised for a thousand years already. Radio-carbon dates for the 'Nok culture' site of Turuga indicate that iron-smelting was being practised there from at least the fourth century before the Christian era; at Hani, in Ghana, a radio-carbon date points to the second century of the Christian era. Radio-carbon dates in the seventh century are associated with iron-smelting furnaces in Nigeria from the foot of the Dala hill in Kano and in the Kubanni valley near Zaria. This area, near a good source of hard lateritic ore, remained a traditional iron-smelting centre over some centuries. South of the River Niger a group of iron-smelting furnaces excavated at Ufe Ijumo have dates in the ninth and twelfth centuries and terminate with a fourteenth-century date.

Apart from the actual iron-smelting furnaces, a number of occupation sites are now showing the use of iron from the beginning of the Christian era, and many more by the middle of the first millennium. Occupation mounds in the section of the Niger valley flooded by the Kainji lake and in the nearby Kaduna valley have produced

dates of -130 , $+100$ and $+200$. The earliest occupation dates for the supposed capital of Mali at Niani and for Ife fall in the sixth century. So also does the earliest date yet obtained for the use of iron in the area of the Benue (Mayo-Kebbi confluence in Cameroon); at the site of Daima, in north-eastern Nigeria south of Lake Chad, the estimated date is only a little earlier. Some of the shell-middens of the Casamance were accumulating from the beginning of our period as a result of the food-gathering habits of iron-using people; research has suggested that it was the ancestors of the present inhabitants, the Diola, who were in occupation of the area. The shell-middens of Dioron Boumak in the delta of the Saloum in Senegal seem to have their beginning towards the end of the eighth century, with an intensification of the exploitation of the shellfish resources from the beginning of the eleventh century.

It is likely that the spread of an iron technology was uneven. Although it was known at Taruga several centuries before the Christian era, it was not adopted elsewhere in the Guinea area until a thousand or more years later. During this period, there must have been many instances of people with a Late Stone Age technology living not far away from people using iron. An example of this kind of situation can be seen in northern Sierra Leone: at Kambai the uppermost level, with iron tools, slag and pottery, produced radio-carbon dates in the seventh and eighth centuries, whereas at Yagala a Late Stone Age technology apparently persisted into the eleventh century. We shall not obtain a historically correct picture of the spread of iron-using in West Africa until we have many more excavated and dated sites of the relevant period distributed in representative localities.

In spite of this unevenness of spread of knowledge of ironworking, we can take it that by the beginning of our period it was widespread; by the end of the period, there must have been very few pockets of Stone Age technology remaining, although it is possible that certain stone tools remained in use.

Local trade

Undoubtedly one of the important effects of the spread of iron was an increase in the efficiency of agricultural production. Iron hoes and tools for bush-clearing would have facilitated the creation of those agricultural surpluses which allow for greater division of labour, craft specialization, and ultimately the development of urbanization and support for a royal or priestly court. On the other hand, there would have grown up local systems of exchange based on specific surpluses and craft specializations. A riverine area might exchange dried fish for grain grown farther away from the river; bush-meat hunted and caught in the savanna might be exchanged for foods only found in the forest. An iron-smelting area might trade iron products for pottery made in an area better endowed with suitable clay. Gradually such networks would grow, and products of one region would travel, perhaps through several intermediaries, for greater and greater distances. Such local exchange systems may be important in the development of centralized authority, for, once the additional wealth derived from long-distance trade is injected into them, it gives power to the chief who controls the bartered resources out of all proportion to what it previously was. Undoubtedly this process was one of the most important things going on during our period in

Guinea, as the tentacles of more developed trans-Saharan trade began to articulate with the already existing exchange systems. Such expansions of the trading network would not have caused the abandonment of the existing local exchange systems; the development of the trade mechanism tends to be additive rather than sequential.

Just as the development of agricultural systems and of iron-smelting was uneven, so undoubtedly was the development of exchange networks. Where exchange systems were poorly developed, there would be a lack of one of the stimuli towards centralization of authority and state formation, helping to preserve the many stateless societies of West Africa. Studies of trade in West Africa have tended to concentrate on external trade but the exchange of natural products between the different ecological zones of West Africa is likely to be ancient.

External trade

One of the most interesting pieces of evidence of a concentration of some form of wealth and, in all probability, going with it, some centralization of social and political authority is provided by the Senegambian megaliths.²

It is interesting to speculate on what made possible the diversion of so much human effort into the cutting, transporting and erecting of these thousands of stone pillars. Because they are carved out of a surface capping of lateritic stone rich in iron, it has been suggested that the monuments were created by people who gained wealth by smelting iron and supplying it to the surrounding communities. This may have been the case but, if so, the smelting-furnaces have not yet been found – any more than the living-sites of the megalith-builders. Another suggestion to account for the Senegambian megaliths sees their location as strategically placed to give the occupants of the area control of trade in gold from the gold-fields of Bure and Bambuk. If the eighth-century dating is correct, this seems a little early for the pull of Arab trade to the north to have been a responsible factor. If the Senegambian megaliths do, in fact, predate Arab trade and owe their existence nevertheless to a northward export of gold, perhaps we should envisage the Berber people of the desert as the intermediaries in a trade with Byzantine North Africa.

To the north of the megalithic area and into the valley of the Senegal is an area of large mounds, some of which have produced pottery comparable to that from the megaliths. There is a rich profusion of grave goods, including gold and carnelian beads, gold and copper ornaments and iron weapons; copper vessels of Moroccan workmanship point to a northward exchange connection. Although there is now an eighth-century radio-carbon date for one of the more southerly mounds, the majority are regarded as belonging to the tenth century. Similarly, other mounds with rich finds have been excavated in the upper Niger valley below Segu; at Kūgha, at the beginning of the great bend of the Niger, one associated with standing-stones has been dated to around +1000. In this same middle Niger bend area, the megaliths of Tondidarou probably date to the same general period and attest to the trade in gold coming down the Niger from the Bure gold-fields. The development of Kumbi Saleh

2. On their distribution, size, date and function, see Chapter 18 of this volume.

as the collecting-point for gold from this source for the trans-Saharan trade begins not later than the eighth century. Both Kumbi Saleh and Awdāghust were probably collecting-points for gold coming from the Bambuk gold-fields, and perhaps it was the greater organization of their trade routes which caused a decline in the social and political importance of communities which had hitherto exploited gold sources further to the west.

In Chapter 14, the existence of an early direct link between Egypt and the western Sudan was mentioned. Perhaps we can see a confirmation of this early route in three radio-carbon dates of the sixth, seventh and tenth centuries from the site of Marandet, in Aïr. Here there are refuse heaps from which some 42,500 crucibles have been turned out, representing the activities of a settlement of artisans. Authorities have disagreed on the metal being worked, there being rival claims for gold. It is important to learn more about Marandet, to confirm and narrow the dating and above all to have some idea of the source of the raw materials being used, the destination of the finished products, the identity of the artisans and the political and commercial control of the organization of the trade. If gold was being worked up at Marandet, the raw material would already have travelled a long way from Bambuk and Bure and be half-way to Egypt. As for the sources of the copper, for a long time research workers have tried to identify the 'Takedda' described by Ibn Baṭṭūta in the fourteenth century as its source. One of these localities was Azelik (150 km to the north-west of Marandet), where ruins and an abundant scatter of slag give evidence of its former importance as a copper-working site. But it has been found that there was insufficient copper ore for exploitation and that it must have been imported copper that was being worked at Azelik, whose radio-carbon dates (twelfth and sixteenth centuries) are later than those for Marandet.

There is plenty of evidence from Arab writers that copper was an important export into the Guinea zone. It was used as currency in Takedda and Kānem in the fourteenth century. A southbound caravan which apparently got into difficulties in the Maḍjābat al-Kubrā in Mauritania early in the twelfth century was carrying 2,000 brass rods and jettisoned them. Gold was the prime commodity desired from West Africa by the trans-Saharan merchants, but there were often valuable products to be obtained which yielded high profits, especially ivory and slaves in areas where no gold was to be obtained, such as the eastern part of the Guinea area.

The beginning of centralization

Igbo-Ukwu lies some 35 km south-west of Onitsha, whose political structure had been influenced by Benin. A number of bronze objects were found here and three sites adjacent to each other were uncovered. The first was a storehouse or shrine where regalia and ritual objects had been kept. The second was the wooden-lined burial chamber of an important personage, and the third was a disposal pit into which ceremonial objects had been cast. The storehouse yielded over seventy major pieces of copper and bronze and nearly five hundred minor items, the burial chamber nineteen major pieces and thirty-two minor ones, the disposal pit thirteen major and eighty-seven minor ones. In the storehouse were over 60,000 beads, and over 100,000 in

the burial-chamber. Such finds were clearly not articles of everyday use by common people, and the treatment accorded to the personage in the burial-chamber indicates a considerable measure of distinction above others in the community. This distinction may be that accorded to a senior (*Ozo*) title-holder of the Igbo title-taking system, perhaps to the *ezenri* himself, the 'priest-king' who, until the early years of the present century, held powerful ritual and religious sway, though not political power, over large parts of Igboland. The most important part of his function was in connection with the yam crop and the fertility of the land, in removing ritual pollutions after taboos had been broken and in settling disputes. For farming communities it was worth while to set aside special resources and special persons whose function it was to ensure the fertility of the land. The centralization of social wealth and political power is usually intimately connected with this process and is likely to have been an integral part of the development of other Guinea kingdoms and centralized institutions.

At Igbo-Ukwu there were no recognizable imports other than the metal for the bronzes and the glass beads. The bronzes are in a style utterly unlike those of Benin or Ife and stand in isolation, so that it is difficult to use stylistic arguments concerning how old they are. The radio-carbon dates yielded for one sample a time-range from the eighth century to the early eleventh; others, however, fell into the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century; this is similar to the date for the only other excavated bronzes comparable to those from Igbo-Ukwu. The reliability of the early radio-carbon dates for Igbo-Ukwu has been disputed but often on erroneous grounds.

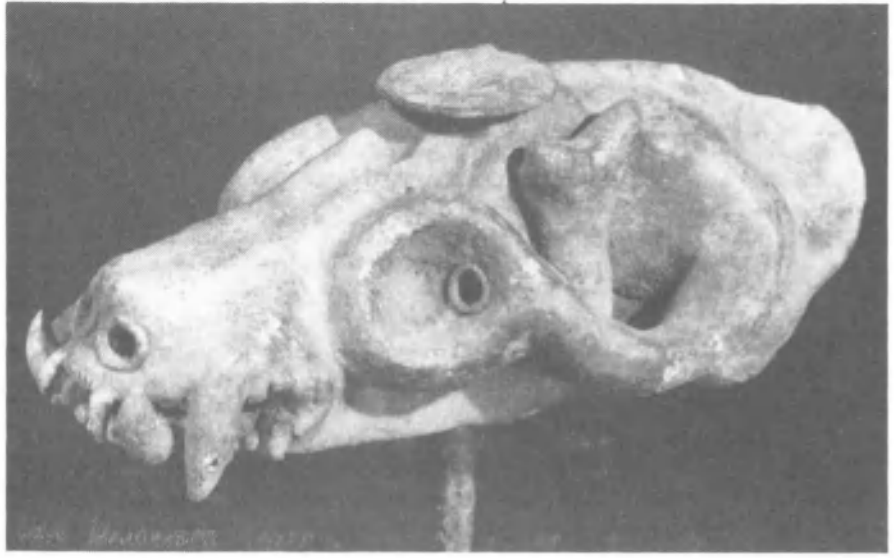
Since the occurrence of copper in Nigeria is minimal, a date in the eleventh century or earlier implies that copper was imported overland from the north. Eastern Nigeria had no gold to export in exchange, so these luxury goods were probably paid for in ivory and slaves. Some have objected that nowhere else as far south in West Africa do we have evidence for long-distance trade in the period indicated by the radio-carbon dates. This is an argument to be respected, but it must be remembered that the earliest route by which the Arab world obtained gold from the western Sudan linked ancient Ghana with Egypt over al-Wāhāt, the oases of *Khārja* and *Dākhlā*. It was only when this route became too dangerous after the middle of the ninth century that the western route from the Maghrib was developed. There was an 'ivory route' in late Roman and Byzantine times from Tripoli to the Lake Chad area along the shortest crossing of the Sahara and it is likely that the Arabs would have also used this route. There is plenty of evidence, not merely for trade in general across the Sahara in the period to which the Igbo-Ukwu finds are assigned by radio-carbon dating, but also for a trade in copper. A possibility, also to be borne in mind and to be checked by future investigation, is that copper could have come from the metalliferous region in the basin of the River Niari, just north of the lower Zaire river.

Perhaps there is some support for the idea of the tentacles of the trans-Saharan trade reaching well to the south by the eleventh century in two radio-carbon dates obtained from the Nyarko quarter of Begho, in Ghana, which became the great collecting-point for gold from Asante traded north to Jenne.



16.2 *Igbo-Ukwu excavation finds.*
(National Commission for Museums and
Monuments, Lagos)
Miniature bronze pendant head – side view
(height: 7.5 cm)

Bronze skull of a leopard mounted on a
copper rod (length: 24 cm)



*Bronze cylindrical bowl
(height 20 cm)*



*Bronze bowl on stand
(height: 27.5 cm)*



Ife

Although the high point of Ife culture lies outside our period – from the mid-twelfth to the mid-fifteenth centuries – we must bear in mind that the development of centralized political and religious institutions, with sufficient wealth to patronize outstanding artistic production, does not take place overnight. Because this formative stage lies within our period, it is proper to give it some consideration. This question of ‘the rise of Ife’ is related to a wider one, that of the origin of Yoruba urbanism in general, which has puzzled a number of writers.

We can take it that, during the first millennium of the Christian era, the forestlands of Nigeria became increasingly settled by a population practising yam and oil-palm agriculture. For some thirty generations, bush clearance and agricultural production had been made more efficient by means of metal tools made from locally produced iron.

This population is likely to have had three characteristics. First, all settled agricultural populations in pre-scientific times feel that as part of their agricultural practices they have to do something to ensure the fertility of the land and the productiveness of their crops. These things are believed to depend upon the goodwill of supernatural powers. Ordinary folk may not feel confident to handle such potentially dangerous forces or be afraid to do so; accordingly, they are happy to delegate the task, for a consideration, to specialists who do not have the same hesitancy and who claim to have the necessary expert knowledge. Thus cults and their priests are important in the life of the community.

Secondly, there is commonly a build-up of population. This is not automatic and it is usually slow, but it does take place; there may be negative feedback effects from famine years and from diseases, but births tend to be more frequent. This population increase itself affects agricultural practices and modifies them in the direction of the more efficient exploitation of different ecozones.

Thirdly, this more efficient exploitation of resources is likely to have led to specialization in different ecological areas, with an exchange of products between them. This favours occupational specialization and economic interdependence and geographically adjacent segments of the society become symbiotic. That Ife may have occupied a special position in an exchange network will be suggested later.

Different conditions seem to have prevailed west of the Niger from those in the east, where Igbo farmers felt safe enough to live in dispersed homesteads in the middle of their farming land. Defensive earthworks, common in Edo and Yoruba country, indicate that, for some reason we can at present only guess at, west of the Niger the needs of defence made the farmers live together in villages within walking distance of their farms. Accordingly, the social system which developed among the Yoruba and Edo-speaking peoples was different from that of the Igbo. Because people of different lineages were living close together, the claims of a neighbour began to rival, and then outstrip, those of a kinsman. The demands of kinship tended to threaten the solidarity of the village in its defensive needs, and the disruptive effects of these obligations were siphoned off by giving certain lineages specified functions in the life of the community, such as providing the chief, the war leader, the historian, the spokesman and the priest. This leadership tended to develop into permanent authority.

Permanent authority, in its turn, when developed on any large scale, itself requires assistants and an administrative class to help carry out its functions. Or have we put the cart before the horse? Was it the fact that the Yorubas had already developed a hierarchical social system, with a greater and greater proportion of the fruits of production concentrated at the pinnacle and in the upper layers of the social pyramid, which tended to exacerbate and increase the inter-community rivalry for control of the fruits of production – and perhaps, in the form of land, of the means of production too?

Or, if it was the needs of defence which nucleated a scattered agricultural population into villages, what was the nature of the threat? Had the density of population reached the point where there was real competition for the available agricultural land, so that one community threatened another? Or did the threat come from outside, as a result of the commercial and military dominance of the trading states to the north, Mali and Songhay? One of our difficulties here is that we do not know enough about the dates at which these various earthworks in Yorubaland were built. Apart from the fourteenth–fifteenth century inner wall at Benin, the majority of the earthwork systems in the Edo-speaking area appear to be internally generated and to be more in the nature of boundaries. Perhaps, in fact, defensive earthwork building did not begin in Yorubaland until the external pressures were felt – as they certainly were after 1100: at its greatest extent, the domination of Mali extended down the River Niger to within 100 km of the most northerly Yoruba settlements. We can only guess at how these pressures first exerted themselves, but the most likely demand was for slaves. Slave-raiding was more important in the central than in the western Sudan, because the former produced no gold. A system of exchange, in which such things as shea-butter from the northern savannas were traded into the forest areas in return for products such as kola, may be older than any long-distance trade. Once this exchange system had been established, the northern areas found themselves in a position to offer other goods obtained from further afield; this, in turn, would have stimulated the export of additional products from the south.

Given, on the one hand, the need for cults and for priests to serve them as specialists in supernatural farm management and, on the other, the need for the institutionalization of redistributive arrangements, the resulting situation is well on the way to the emergence of some form of ceremonial centre. Where there is a build-up towards exchange systems, such specialists tend more and more to become located at the nodes of such systems. A priestly functionary will expect a price for his services, sometimes directly, sometimes in the form of sacrificial offerings to the divine powers, most commonly a recognized mixture of both. In this situation grew up the ceremonial centre, in which the co-ordinated institutions of temple and palace, of shrines and an *alafin* or *oba*, emerged as the effective redistributive institutions. There is less evidence for the *oni* of Ife having been involved in the trade than for the *oba* of Benin: this may be on account of the later collapse of Ife's commercial hegemony in the fifteenth–sixteenth century. The *oba* of Benin controlled all trading by individuals outside Benin and alone owned the most valuable articles of trade – slaves, leopard skins, pepper, palm-kernels, coral and most ivory. However, one of the Yoruba *ife oriki*, or divination songs, gives us a hint: it refers to Oduduwa, the founding hero and first *oni* of Ife,

as a trader, grown wealthy from the export of locally produced kola-nuts, who imported horses from the north.

Situated on fertile land in the forest, Ife was within reach both of the savanna to the north and of the coast to the south. Thus we can see how Ife could develop into a ceremonial centre with the *oni* regarded as a sacred figure, supported by tribute and toll on local trade, and in a commanding position by virtue of his pre-eminence in the religious system. Such a centralization of ritual and supernatural authority carried with it a potential for exploitative economic supremacy and for genuine political power. When, therefore, the commercial demands from the north began to make themselves felt, Ife was in a good position to take advantage of them. Those wanting slaves began to buy them from the established authorities of these areas. The later Atlantic slave-traders found the same thing at the coastal margin of the forest. Commercial slavery became added to domestic bondage and the trade enhanced the wealth and power of the *oni* and his entourage, which itself grew and developed with the system. Where external trade impinged upon African societies not endowed with exports such as gold, but where a process of political centralization had begun, slaves would be the most obvious exportable commodity. The most conservative estimate of the number of slaves exported across the Sahara to North Africa in the first half of the nineteenth century is 10,000 a year³ and this trade had been going on for very many centuries; even if the numbers involved were smaller at the time of Ife's pre-eminence, the trade could well have been the principal source of Ife's wealth. The slaves sold to northern traders were probably paid for in salt, but as the trading relationship became established and this in turn helped to develop the wealth and power of the *oni*, so other luxury goods would become added to the imports from the north, and other indigenous products be offered in exchange. Copper and brass, textiles, beads, bracelets, swords and horses were added to the expensive imports. In the mid-twelfth century, al-Idrīsī also mentions spices, perfumes and manufactured iron tools as exported from southern Morocco to the land of the blacks. How the crafts of brass-casting and glass bead-making became established we cannot tell. However 'slavery' is defined, seeing it as the essential basis of the economic and social system that gave rise to the art of Ife in no way detracts from that art; the institution of slavery underlay the artistic productions of classical Greece – and we do not think worse of them for that. The copper and brass had to be paid for in some way, since there is virtually no copper in Nigeria and there are many Arab records of its export to West Africa along the coastly caravan routes from the north, as already pointed out in connection with Igbo-Ukwu. The other exotic luxuries would also have been expensive. Perhaps the kola-nut trade has a very ancient history and kola and ivory helped to pay the bills; but it is difficult to think of anything other than slaves as the major exportable commodity. The suggestion that trade was important in the generation of the Ife state does not imply that the kingship was dependent on the personnel engaged in this trade. Nevertheless, once external trade injects surplus wealth into the local exchange system, it enormously adds to the power of the chiefs who control its distribution.

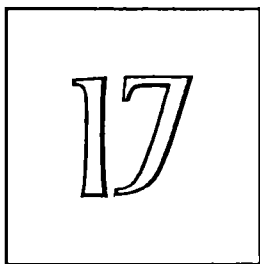
3. See Volume IV, Chapters 6 to 10.

There are a number of hints of the influence from the north – the tradition that Obatala, the creator of mankind, was ‘white’, the technique of brass-casting employed and the location along the Niger of the ‘Tsoede’ group of bronzes. Their position along the northern frontier of Yorubaland can be interpreted as indicating the importance of this direction of movement.

Other hints of a northerly connection have been claimed in some of the art and architecture of ancient Ife. This ‘influence’ has been seen in the employment of the guilloche and rosette patterns; in the impluvium type of house which follows the same plan as the Roman ‘atrium’ house; and in the stone and potsherd pavements resembling their mosaic and tessellated counterparts.

These resemblances may be fortuitous, and many things could easily have arisen independently; these hints of connections into a world far away from Yorubaland do not prove that the arts of Ife were not really indigenous. Brass-casting and bead-making are likely to have remained a royal prerogative, the latter perhaps connected with the provision of beaded crowns for the sixteen rulers in Yorubaland entitled to wear them by virtue of authority from Ife.

A starting-point for the high point of ancient Ife in the twelfth century would fit in with the likely date of the filtering down into Yorubaland of those commercial demands from the northern world of which Ife was able to take advantage. Perhaps the empire of Mali was too far away to provide this stimulus, and we should look rather to the early Hausa states, in the rise of which economic factors played an important role. We know that at a later date Zazzau specialized in slave-raiding southwards, and perhaps the now abandoned urban site of Turunku fulfilled this role at an earlier period; it lies only 300 km from the Niger at Tada. Unfortunately, we still know little archaeologically about the early Hausa states, and the site of Turunku has not yet been excavated.



The Guinean belt: the peoples between Mount Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire

Linguistics and early history

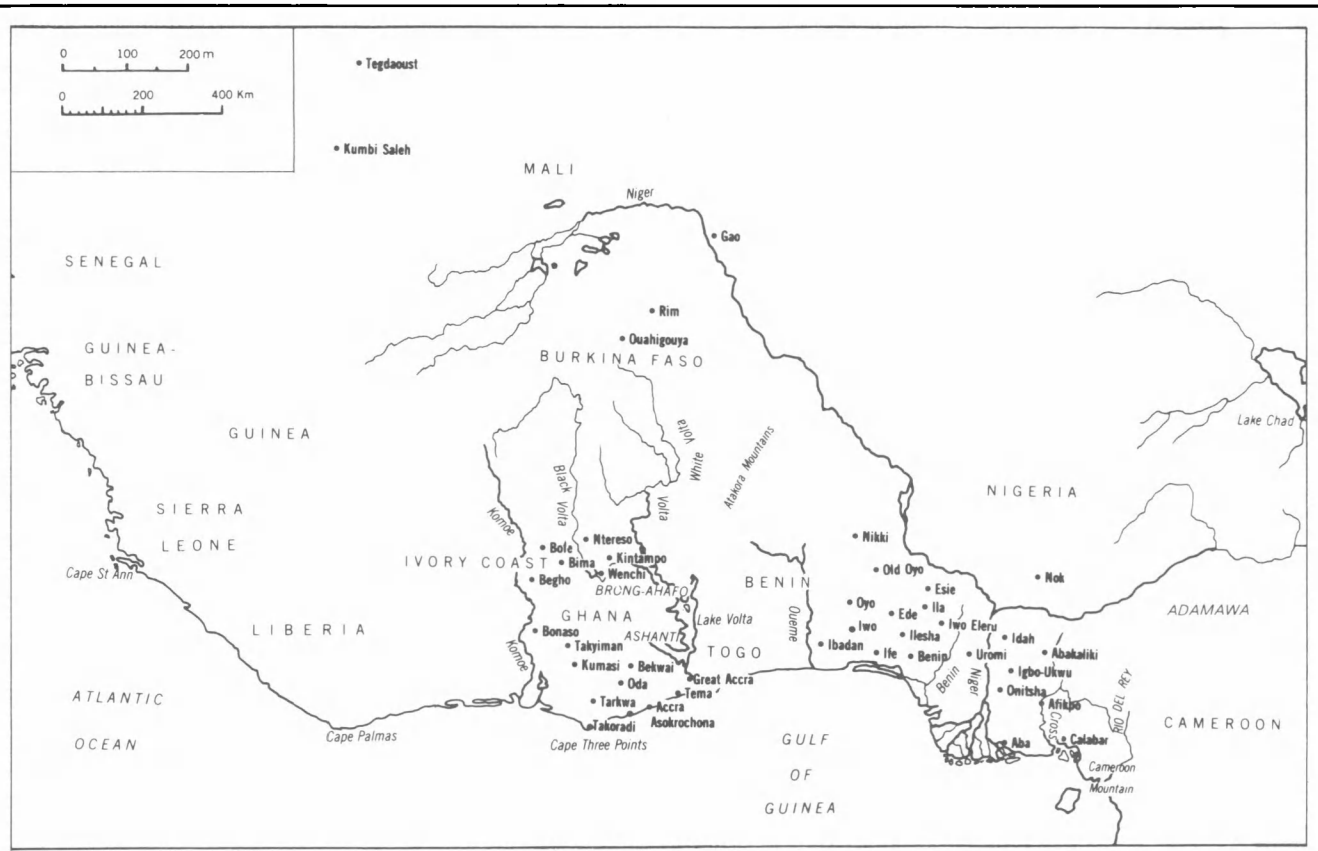
The archaeological evidence indicates that the Lower Guinea coast and forest now occupied by Kwa- and Benue-Congo-speaking peoples were inhabited by farmers and, before that, by hunters several thousand years ago. Although archaeological and linguistic evidence suggests a general physical and cultural relationship between the earlier and present inhabitants, that relationship has yet to be precisely determined. Such delimitation is necessary especially as some of the present inhabitants have myths of origin which tend to show that they have come into their areas of present abode relatively recently.

The greater part of the forest belt of West Africa, i.e. an area stretching over 1600 km from central Liberia to beyond the lower Niger, is occupied by peoples speaking a series of related languages, with underlying similarities in vocabulary and structure. These are the Kwa and Benue-Congo subfamilies of the Niger-Congo language family.

In the central region, the most important of the Kwa subfamily are the Akan (Twi, Fanti, etc.) and Guang dominant in Ghana and *Côte d'Ivoire*; Gã and Adangbe (Dangme) in southern Ghana; and Ewe, dominant in Togo and Benin and also spoken in south-eastern Ghana. The members of the eastern Kwa subfamily in Lower Guinea are Yoruba - Igala, the Nupe group (including Nupe, Gbari, Igbirra and Gade), Edo, the Idoma group (including Idoma, Agatu and Iyala), Igbo and Ijo. Benue-Congo-speakers are present directly north and along the Cross river and include the Ibibio, Efik and Ekoi groupings, as well as the Tiv.

Comparative linguistics suggest that the Volta-Comoe languages (the Akan group) constitute an ancestral group to many other Kwa subgroupings; that the Togo remnant languages are distinct from the Ewe and Gã-Adangme groups respectively; and that the Akan, Ewe, Guang and Gã-Adangme groups constitute a group less closely related to the Kwa language groups of southern Nigeria.

The Niger-Benue confluence is generally regarded as a likely centre of origin or dispersal for the eastern Kwa-speaking peoples. That the division between the major Kwa groups must be very old has been inferred from exploratory studies in glottochronology. It has also been established that generally the Kwa languages are very distinctive and divergent from the more widespread linguistic groups that surround them. Indeed, they could be survivors of once more widely spread linguistic stocks.



17.1 Towns and sites mentioned in the text. (B. W. Andah)

It seems also that there is no clear boundary between some of the Kwa (e.g. Igbo) and Benue-Cross languages, such as Ibibio, Efik and Kele. There are some Benue-Congo languages (like Junkun) without noun class systems, while some Kwa languages (e.g. Dogama and Edo) have them. On the other hand, it seems that the Igbo and Efik languages, having been in intimate contact for a long period, could have experienced a partial amount of undetected borrowing, even in basic vocabulary.

Historical geographic evidence furthermore suggests that the already inhabited forest was an obstacle to penetration by later peoples. When such penetration occurred, it was not in the form of mass migrations but rather was confined to small groups who, even if they exerted great cultural influence, were probably absorbed linguistically and sometimes physically by the local populations.

The Gold Coast between 600 and 1100

The period from the seventh to the eleventh century was clearly a formative one, transitional between the prehistoric village complex antedating the seventh century on the one hand, and the urban, commercial, high-level technology complexes of 1200 and later, on the other. The apparent obscurity of the period 600-1100 is due not to the uneventfulness of the period *per se* (since the earlier prehistoric era from -1500 to +500 has been heavily documented from several parts of the country), but rather to less attention being given by scholars to the period and the incidence of research.

It is possible that some or all of the Proto-Akan, Proto-Guan and Proto-Gã-Dangme languages were in use by the first millennium before the Christian era. From the correlation of linguistic studies on Baule, Agni, Bia and Akan with archaeology, there is emerging the possibility (although it still has to be tested) that Proto-Akan evolved in the forest and savanna environment straddling the middle and southern parts of Côte d'Ivoire and the Gold Coast, and that the Kintampo complex,¹ whose sites have now been identified in both countries, may well be the archaeological equivalent of an ecologically adapted Proto-Akan-speaking populace which knew no territorial boundary such as now exists between Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.

While small-scale movement of peoples and trade and cultural contacts are regular features in the evolution of most societies and must be recognized as such, the old idea of the mass exodus of people from place to place is, except for rare cases, an unconvincing approach to explaining ethnic and cultural origins. In this respect, the old views of migration origins of the Akan from Egypt or ancient Ghana, and the theory of Gã-Dangme origin from Dahomey-Nigeria must, on archaeological and linguistic grounds, be regarded as far-fetched.

One of the major landmarks in the cultural evolution of the Gold Coast peoples is the inception and development of iron technology. The earliest evidence for it is from Begho (+105-255) and Abam, Bono Manso (+290-350). Excavations of these sites have produced ruins of furnaces, slag and pottery as well as charcoal for dating purposes.

1. On the Kintampo complex, see Chapter 24 in Volume II.

Akanland

The rock-shelter site of Amuowi near Bono Manso has a date (+370–510) which is slightly antecedent to the period under discussion. But this date ties in with the date for iron-smelting at Abam, Bono Manso. The evidence of pottery and dating from the Amuowi excavations suggest that, from around the sixth century, the Brong of the Bono Mansa area were establishing permanent settlements that would lead later to the proto-urban and urban settlement at Bono Manso.

The site of Bonoso has an early date that falls exactly within this period. Excavations conducted there have brought to light an iron-smelting industry, with slag, iron implements and pottery ornamented with comb impressions. The site is dated by radio-carbon to 660–1085.

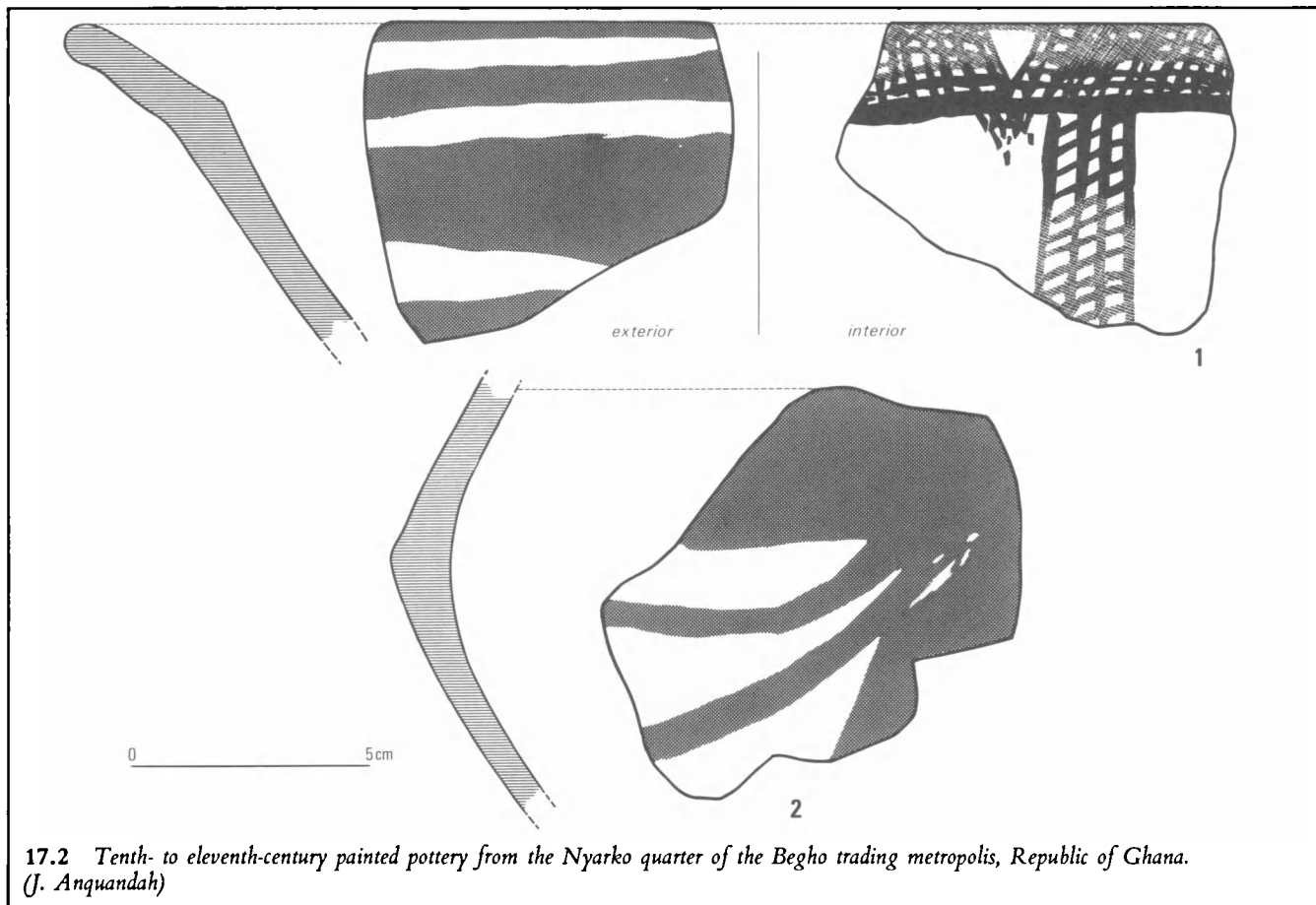
A third Brong site belonging to this period is the proto-urban settlement at Begho. The Nyarko suburb of Begho, which is dated by radio-carbon to 965–1125, extends over an area of about one kilometre square. Altogether the materials from this site reflect the general tendencies of the period 600–1100, namely craft and technological specialization, proto-urbanism and possibly the beginnings of the ivory industry and export trade. The Brong region seems to have been a pioneering Akan area for the evolution of Iron Age farming, metallurgy, urbanism, state formation and long-distance trade.

The Asante and Wassa areas are well known for their prominent hilltop sites, which were the favourite locations of Iron Age settlements of the period between the beginning of the Christian era and 1500. The most notable of these sites are Nkukoa Buoha (near Kumasi), Bekwai, Kwapong, Obuasi Monkey Hill, Nsuta, Tarkwa, Ntirikurom and Odumparara Bepo. The sites appear to have been village settlements with palisades. The evidence of the iron technology in use at this complex points to the foundation-laying character of this period preparatory to the major epoch of urbanization, state formation and long-distance trade evidenced in Adanse, Denkyira and Asante.

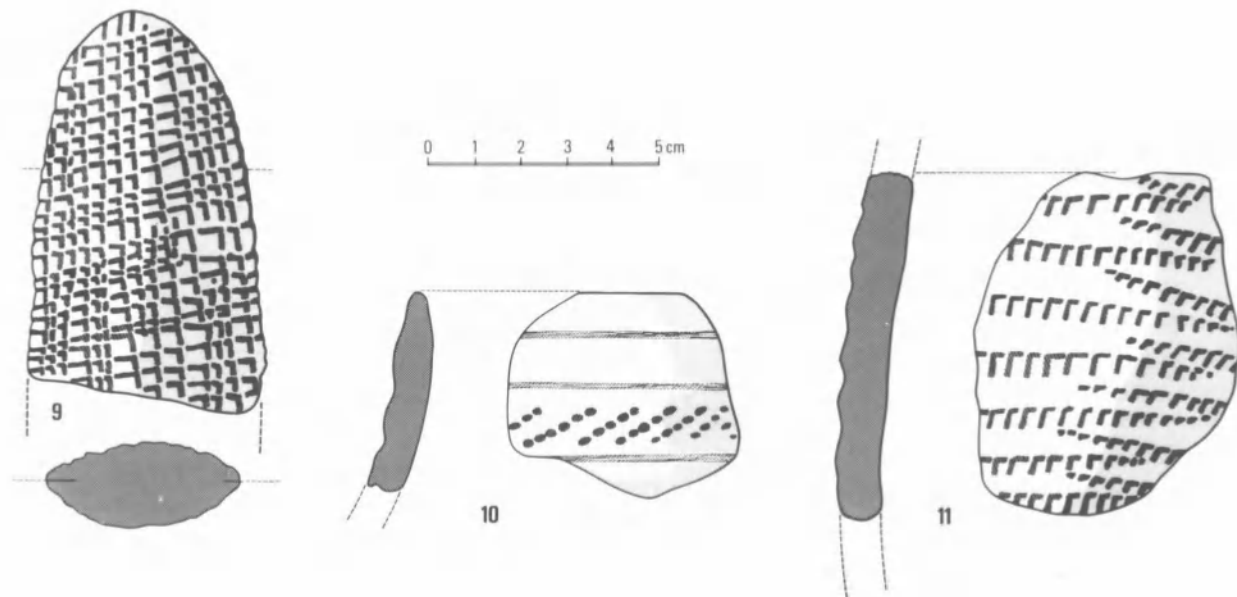
The area of Akyem Manso and Akwatia is noted for its earthen fortifications. A number of the fortified sites have been excavated in an attempt to test the two hypotheses advanced to explain their function. The first hypothesis is that they were constructed for defence; the second is that they were designed to wall in labour camps built for the exploitation of alluvial gold deposits in the Birim valley. It appears that the 'defence' school of thought has tended to carry more weight than the 'labour camp' theory.

The Guan

Oral traditions recount that around 1200 the Guan settlers who were in occupation of the Afram plains established their capital at Ganebofo, whence the Atara dynasty ruled the Afram plains Guan. A commercial centre was set up at Juafo Abotan, where the brisk commerce was pursued with the Sudanic belt in ivory, cola, cattle, salt and slaves. A number of excavations have been undertaken at Bosumpra cave and rock shelters at Apreku, Tetewabuo and Akyekyemabuo. The excavations supported by radio-carbon dating indicate that in *c.* 1000–1300 the Kwahu scrap was occupied by



17.2 Tenth- to eleventh-century painted pottery from the Nyarko quarter of the Begho trading metropolis, Republic of Ghana. (J. Anquandah)



17.3 Kintampo 'neolithic' Complex Culture materials from period I (c. -1500 to -500) at Nkukoa Buoho, near Kumasi, Republic of Ghana. Left: pot-shaping tool; centre and right: stamped pottery. (J. Anquandah)

versatile hunters, fisherfolk, pastoralists and oil-palm exploiters who produced 'smoke-glazed' pottery.

The area of Dawu and Awukugua is marked by numerous large mounds representing litter deposited by the local people over long periods. Although the dating of the middens is a little later than the period we are concerned with here, the cultural context associated with the ubiquitous mounds of Akuapem suggests foundation-laying processes which heralded the modern states of the Akuapem Hill-Guan.

The Gã and Dangme

The archaeology and ethnolinguistics of the Accra plains indicate that the Gã and Dangme peoples have probably been occupying settlements in this area for some one to two millennia. A number of sites such as Gbegbe, Little Accra, Pampram and Lölövö, though as yet undated, contain ruins of settlements with concentrations of pottery not associated with European imports, thus suggestive of a period before 1400, whereas Ladoku and Shai were the focus of numerous settlements belonging to the period 600–1400. Between 1000 and 1300, local Dangme settlers around Prampram, Dawhenya and Shai were evolving a life style of subsistence (pastoralism, fishing, salt-making and terraced agriculture based on Guinea corn cultivation), and a socio-theocratic system that was to lead later to the rise of a conurbation or twin-township at Shai and Ladoku, and a civilization characterized by elaborate herbal science, *Klama* proverbial and philosophical types of music and a combined theocratic and monarchical system.

Urban settlements

The available evidence points to the existence of at least two principal types of urban settlement in modern Ghana prior to European advent, namely commercial centres like Begho, and state capitals like Bono Manso. Migrant elements and long-distance trade were important to their growth. Prior to the advent of the Mande, the region of Jakpawuase was well populated and contained large settlements, which had previously developed an interwoven network of local trade and exchange.

Work at Begho revealed that the culture of this town was predominantly Brong, with evidence for significant outside influences. The largest quarter, that of the Brong, consists of several hundred mounds in an area more than a kilometre across. Other quarters are one to two kilometres apart, with an exposed outcrop of laterite between them, where the market was said to have been located.

The urban phase of Begho (Bew) was preceded by an agricultural pastoral phase dating as far back as 3500 years ago. Evidence from pottery suggests that, before the mid-second millennium (especially the eleventh–twelfth centuries), settlements in the Begho vicinity (and pre-urban Begho phase) were mostly of the autochthonous Bono group. With the course of time, the town graduated from a Brong (Akan) foundation to incorporate Voltaic and Mande people engaged in different occupations.

Begho existed as a trading centre from the eleventh century, but did not attain its peak until the fourteenth century. Then it appears to have contained up to 500 compounds and 5,000 people. It comprised five territorially distinct quarters, with the

largest being well over half a kilometre across. Their farmlands stretched much farther afield.

Very little is known of the nature of the society other than what can be inferred from a study of later traditional Akan life. The traditions nevertheless indicate the existence of domestic slaves and an active clan system.

Like many other ancient settlements, it is not clear how Bono Manso was founded. Its growth and importance owed much to the integration into one state of various pre-existing chiefdoms in the area around the end of the first millennium. Bono Manso was not the earliest of the large villages and towns in this area; it was simply the first to acquire supremacy over all the settlements in the area through its primary role as the seat of the Bono kings.

Archaeological survey has revealed at least five iron-working industrial sites. One of these dates to the fourth century of the Christian era, but some probably belong to the urban phase. Bono Manso was located at the savanna-forest contact zone where, at the regional level, savanna items could be exchanged for forest ones. This was also the southernmost limit to which pack-animals could travel without health hazards, and therefore the effective area for the exchange of foreign goods for those from areas further south. The area where Bono Manso was located was not only the source of alluvial gold, which the Mande traders eagerly sought, but was also the source of kola-nuts.

Unlike Begho, there is no evidence for the existence of any alien quarter – which means that Bono's population was more ethnically homogeneous than Begho's. Bono's central organization also effectively controlled commercial activities, whereas at Begho commerce seems to have overridden the political organization.

Yorubaland between 600 and 1100

In Yorubaland, archaeological research has so far been restricted to Ife and Oyo, and, of these two, only the urban phase of Ife dates back to our period.

A traditional Yoruba town apparently comprised several compounds and each compound consisted of houses built around a series of open courtyards of differing sizes. There were, however, important differences between the various towns, reflecting differences in history and ecology.

Several historians have suggested that one of the most important agents in the growth of urban and state societies was probably the institution of divine kingship. Even though the precise mode of its diffusion is not known, it is seen as probably providing a powerful impetus towards the development of urban forms. Nevertheless, the Yoruba cities were the result of an organic process of internally induced social stratification rather than of the extension of symbolic and organizational patterns already developed elsewhere. But state systems where the idea of divine kingship played an important role in their development were those of Benin and Nri.

There is a large number of stone sculptures in Yorubaland; these differ stylistically from Ife brasses and terracottas, although all occur within sixty miles of Ife in the central Yoruba forest. At sacred groves of Ife, there are figures depicting negroids carved out of a local granite/gneiss in naturalistic style. The most outstanding of these

are in the Idena and Ore groves, together with a kneeling woman in a separate grove near by in steatite.

Elsewhere in Ife there are a number of worked standing-stones, the most impressive of these being an 18-foot-high granite column known as *Opa Oranmiyan* – the staff of Oranmiyan – who was one of the children of Oduduwa and the founder of Oyo. In the main market stands the 6-foot *Opa Ogun* – the staff of Ogun, the god of war and iron – shaped like a cylindrical club.

At Eshure in the Ekiti country, there is a group of carvings with obvious affinities such as the stone figures of Apa Ipetu, which are similar in posture, necklace and arm rings and arrangements of the cloth, but with a more stylized treatment.

In addition to those in Eshure, stone sculptures which show connections with Ife tradition are found at other sites within about 30 miles of Ife, such as Kuta in the west, Ikirun to the north and Effen to the north-west.

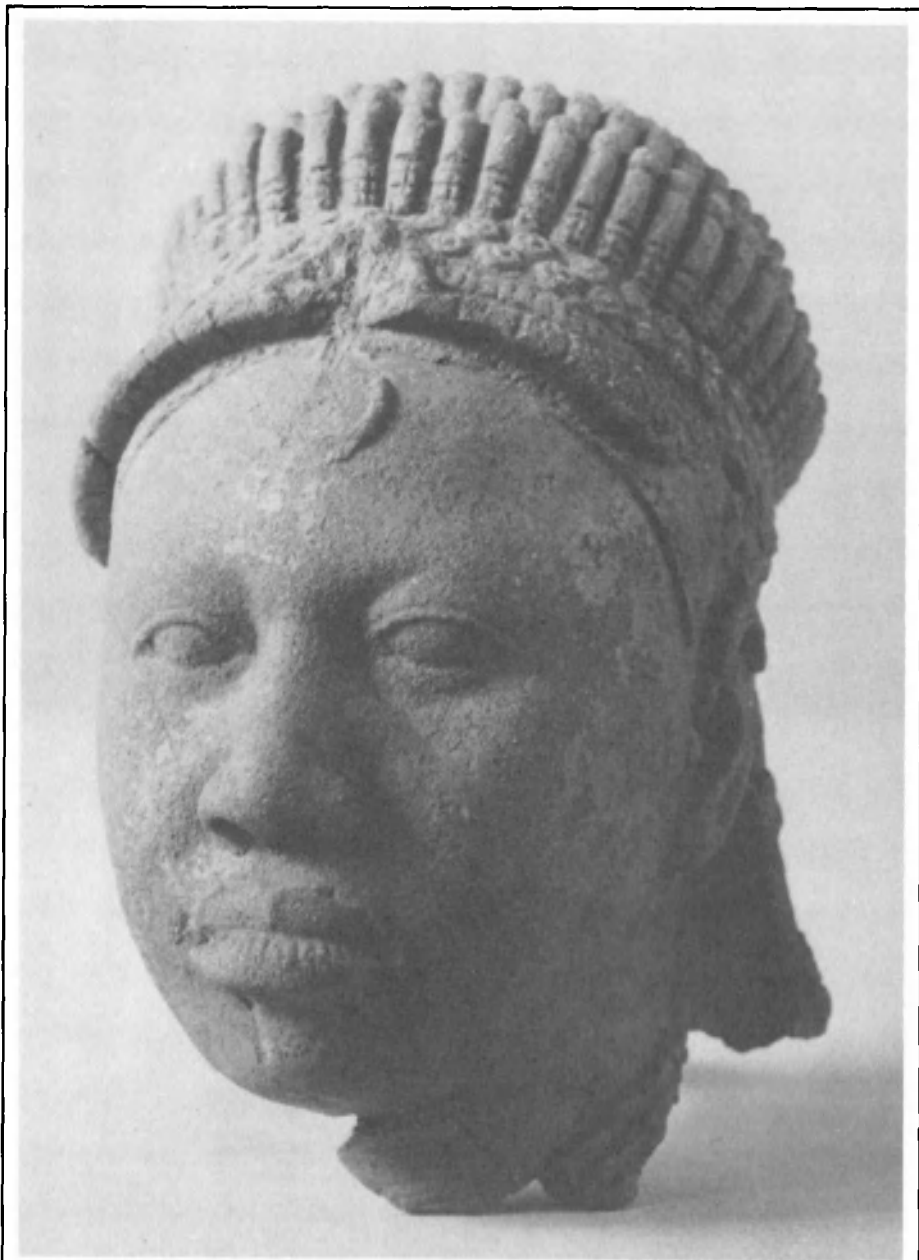
The largest group of stone sculptures in Yoruba country is at the Igbomina town of Esie, which is still within the forest fringe, though the encroaching front of savanna is generally only a few miles' distance to the north. The stone figures are almost certainly the relics of a former occupation. These representations, called *Ere*, number more than 800 and appear to be sculpted in steatite. The complete figures are generally about 60 cm high, although they range in size from about 20 cm to nearly 130 cm. Tradition associates the objects with previous occupants of the area who were conquered or colonized by Oyo. They were a forest people within the cultural sphere of Ife, whose influence can be detected in several recurrent features of the sculptures.

The terracotta and brass sculptures of Ife, which have been dated to the eleventh-twelfth centuries, were certainly created as adornments to the royal ancestor cult of the *oni* (king) of Ife, as also were the remarkable quartz stools and granite monoliths. The fact that over 800 Esie figures have elaborate head-dresses and other ornaments and are seated on stools suggests that they also depict royalty.

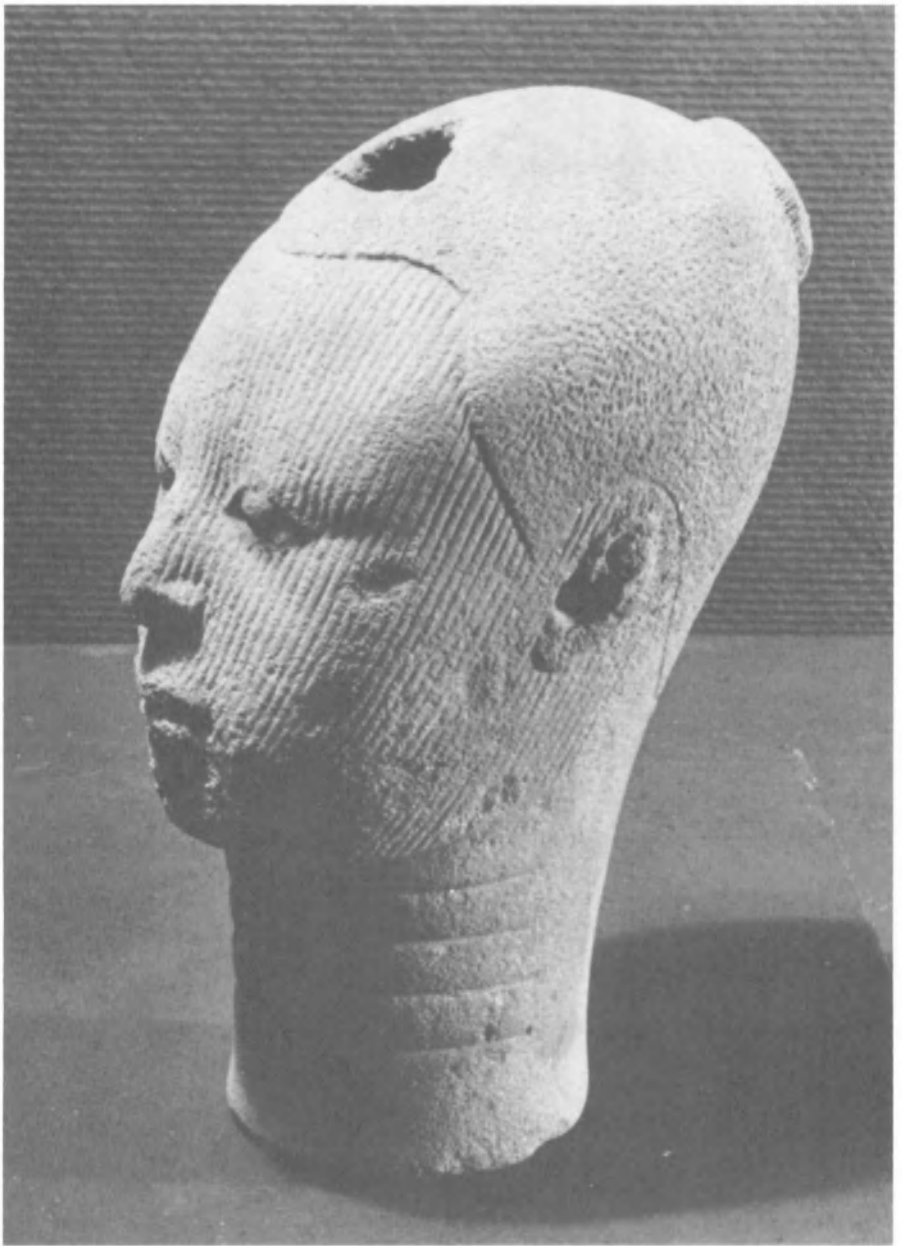
It is crucial to find out what links, if any, chronological and otherwise, exist between the stone sculptures and the terracotta and bronze traditions; and what relationships exist between this stone sculpture tradition and those found in other parts of West Africa.

In his work on Ife art, Willett has noted many general characteristics which Ife sculptures share with those of Nok. He also suggests that the naturalistic ears of Ife could have provided a basis for the freely stylized interpretations of Benin. This and other similar evidence is considered by him as indicating connections across time and space and of continuity in artistic tradition in West Africa through more than two millennia.

The Yoruba appear to constitute a logical point of departure for the study of the coastal and inland peoples of Lower Guinea. Their key role becomes clearer if a look is taken at the early population movements in southern Nigeria. There was evidently first an early spread of the Yoruba-Igala group west and southward from an original point somewhere in the north-east. Second, Igala traditions relate their early expansion on the east bank of the Niger, with movement eastward against the Idoma and southward against the Igbo-speaking peoples. Third, the position of the Itsekiri in the south-western part of the Niger delta indicates that this Yoruba group expansion



17.4 Terracotta head from a figure, possibly a queen, excavated at Ita Yemoo, Ife. Height: 23.1 cm. (Photo: copyright Frank Willett)



17.5 Terracotta head found beside the Ifewara Road, Ife. Height: 22.5 cm. (Photo: copyright Frank Willett)

may have occurred prior to the expansion of Edo-speakers towards the coast.

An early southward invasion of the Niger delta by the Ijo-speaking peoples is also inferred. This movement appears to have been followed at a later time first by a southward and east-curving movement of Edo; second by a general southward Igbo expansion into the uplands west of the Niger; and third by another Igbo push toward the eastern delta coast, which was still under way during the development of the slave-trade.

Ife is so far the earliest known Yoruba settlement, and it was ruled by *onis* who exerted a spiritual power over a wider area for a long time. It also served as the dispersal point for the subsequent founding of Oyo and five other major Yoruba towns, as well as for the replacement of a former native dynasty at Benin around the fourteenth-fifteenth century. Ife is said to have been founded by an invading group armed with iron weapons which settled among an indigenous group called Igbo.

Between the seventh and eleventh century Ife was in the ascendancy culturally as well as politically. Some of the bronzes have definitely been dated to the mid-eleventh century, and it is possible that some of the art in terracotta may have been of much greater antiquity than the bronzes.

We can discern three major periods in the growth of Ife. During the earliest phase dated to —350, Ife was simply a scattered cluster of thirteen hamlets occupied by villagers who farmed. The next major phase was the founding of medieval Ife, with a more elaborate social structure. It is not clear whether this urbanization and social change resulted from independent agreement amongst the communities, or from the imposition of a new order from outside, nor do we really know when exactly these changes were occurring. Nevertheless, it seems that at least some of these early but crucial developments of Ife took place somewhere between the seventh and eleventh centuries. Apparently it was also sometime during this period that the road pattern as retained to this day, to Ede, Old Oyo and through Ilesha to Benin, was first established.

The naturalistic sculpture tradition at Ife also dates back at least to 960 ± 130 . An elaborate glass bead-work was also present at Ife and Benin. Domestic pottery at Ife appears to have been more elaborate than that at Nok, especially in the sense that decoration was more varied and included incision, burnishing, painting and rouletting.

Benin

The excavations by Graham Connah have shown the walls of Benin to be a honeycomb of linear earthworks delimiting territory and not defensive fortifications. These suggest that Benin city, like Ife, may originally have been an aggregate of small groups, each of which owed allegiance to the *oba* (king) but had its own farmlands surrounded by its own bank and ditch. The city was surrounded by an innermost wall which was not built before the fourteenth century and was most likely erected by the mid-fifteenth century.

The outer wall, on the other hand, is attributed by tradition to *oba* Oguola in the late thirteenth century and archaeological evidence certainly confirms that it is older than the inner wall. Evidence from art survivals combined with oral tradition also

throws some light on this period of Benin history. The domestic arts, which included wood-carving, started in the time of Ere, who was the second of the Ogisos, the dynasty before the present one, and who seems to have begun his rule between 900 and 980. This Ere is credited with the introduction of many regalia and symbols, as well as with the foundation of the guilds of carvers and carpenters. If correct, it would mean that Benin society had, at the time of Ere, reached the point where the formal organization of artists and craftsmen had become necessary. The belief in ancestors was symbolized in the making of the wooden heads which were used in a memorial context. The practice of making memorial heads could thus be said to have existed for some 350 or 450 years before brass-casting – which is credited to Oguola's reign – was introduced to Benin. Although one cannot be certain as to when the sequence of Benin bronze heads began, this event may be placed sometime around the first quarter of the fourteenth century.

It can be assumed that the art of carving had been established well before the Ogi dynasty came to power. The stage had thus been long set for the introduction of the manufacture of bronze heads in memory of past kings. Although the technology of bronze-working was introduced in Benin in Oguola's time, tradition has it that bronze works of art were sent to Benin from Ife before his reign. For how long before, one cannot tell.

Linguistic evidence suggests that the Edo have occupied their present home for a period of almost four thousand years. For most of this period, the village settlement constituted the political unit, where the fundamental pattern of authority was made up by male age-grade associations. What led to the development of a new system of political organization in the former village structure is not yet clear. Some authorities have suggested diffusion from the older and nearby Yorubaland, where for many years there was a centralized political unit or kingdom. Others have suggested the independent development of relatively large political units in the area.

This initial phase was superseded by a period of 'sorting out' among the early towns, which involved some strong political competition. At this period of competition among the chiefdoms (c. 1170) and apparently resulting from it, an alien dynasty from Yorubaland was introduced into Benin. This new dynasty began a process by which Benin emerged as the major urban settlement of the area.

Igbo-Ukwu and the Nri 'kingdom'

The earliest corpus of Nigerian bronzes has been unearthed in Igbo country to the east of the Niger. Approximately 100 bronzes were brought to light at Igbo-Ukwu (in northern Igboland) and at Ezira 24 kilometres to the east of Igbo-Ukwu. Among these finds there are various objects described as staff heads, human figurines, elephant tusks, bronze objects depicting flies, beetles, grasshoppers and eggs, and heads of animals such as leopards, elephants, rams, monkeys, snails and pythons. Most of these bronzes are small, except for some vessels about 40 cm in diameter, and human imagery is limited to a few specimens, including a Janus head, a face pendant, an equestrian figure and frontal figures on two 'altar stands'. The site has been dated to the ninth century, making it older than Ife, which has been presumed to mark the



17.6 Igbo-Ukwu excavation finds. ▲ Bronze roped pot, with bronze altar stand (behind and to the left) in the storehouse of regalia (scale: 1 foot long). ▼ Highly decorated pottery vessel from the disposal pit at Igbo-Ukwu (height: 40.6 cm). (Photo: copyright Thurstan Shaw)



inception of Nigeria's great traditions in metalwork. The entire Igbo-Ukwu find, including clay, glass, iron and copper artefacts, may have constituted the burial goods of an ancient Igbo ruler who exerted control over northern Igbo country and beyond.

M. A. Onwuejogwu has attempted to reconstruct the socio-political organization of the Nri people from earliest known times to the eighteenth century. His major conclusion is that the Nri of the Igbo-Ukwu and neighbouring areas had developed a state system sustained and institutionalized by the ritual manipulations of symbols.

All the evidence suggests the establishment of Nri hegemony in Igboland from as far back as the ninth century. Colonization and expansion by the Nri kingdom were achieved by sending Nri people to other settlements, the allegiance of such new areas to the *Eze Nri* (king) being obtained through ritual oath. The *Eze Nri's* will was enforced not through military might but through ritual and mystical sanctions. Authority was vested in a ruler (*Eze Nri*) and ties with his sphere of influence were maintained by travelling priests, who cleansed abominations and conferred rights of leadership. Although nothing survives of the *Eze Nri's* power, title societies continue to be instrumental in local decision-making, despite colonial and national governmental machinery.

Nri influence extended beyond a nuclear northern Igbo region to Igbo settlements on the west bank of the Niger, and to communities affected by Benin's historic domination of the lower Niger.

There are a few similarities between Igbo-Ukwu, Ife and Benin bronze casting, such as the employment of ram- and elephant-head motifs, but these may not be significant in art-historical terms. Analysis has also shown that the majority of the lower Niger figures are like those of the Igbo-Ukwu bronzes, whereas the Benin pieces are almost exclusively brass, in which the proportion of zinc tended to increase with time.

All these findings would appear to support William Fagg's assertion that there existed two main style groups of West African metalwork, the Ife/Benin and modern Yoruba in central Nigeria, flanked by traditions which employed fine threads of wax or latex in making their models. It would seem now that the Ife/Benin tradition intruded into the area of an older and distinct tradition. It is also possible that the ironworking tradition at Igbo-Ukwu was distinct from that of Ife/Benin and Nok.

The Igbo-Ukwu excavations clearly indicate that ironworking in south-eastern Nigeria is at least as old as the ninth century, and there is every reason to suggest that it was older. Other foci of metallurgical working among the Igbo were the Abiriba iron-smelters, as well as iron- and bronze-smiths located near the Okigwe-Arochuku ridge, and the Nkwere smiths in the southern part of this region.

It is not clear what the time/cultural relationship is between Ife and Igbo-Ukwu, although Willett thinks it possible that Ife may date to much earlier than is presently known, and may even be much nearer Nok than present evidence (tenth–twelfth century) suggests. Indeed, if the Ife beads are the same as the 'akori' beads of the Guinea coast, it is conceivable that the Igbo-Ukwu glass beads were manufactured at Ife. If so, this would mean that Ife culture dates at least as far back as do Igbo-Ukwu finds (ninth century).

The bronzes and beads reflect the wealth of the economy and the great artistic skill of the makers of the bronzes, and show the extent to which the area was part of

the network of international trade. According to Thurston Shaw, the raw materials for the bronzes, namely copper and leaded bronze, were imported from copper mines at Takedda and further afield in the Sahara. However, it is also interesting to note that such material was available at Abakaliki and Calabar and may well have come from there.

The material cultures of ancient Igbo-Ukwu, Ife and Benin are often seen as representing high points of Iron Age development in the area. Excavations reveal peoples possessing iron tools and weapons capable of making the forest yield great wealth and utilizing ideas of urbanization and social and religious organization to good effect. Furthermore, they were probably in trading contact with the Muslim world and may or may not have obtained knowledge of the art of lost-wax metal-casting by that means.

The Akwanshi

In the northern part of the Cross River valley, there is evidence of a unique art heritage of hard-stone sculptures, known as *Akwanshi*. They appear to have been the work of ancestors of a restricted group of Ekoid Bantu living in the north – especially the Nta, Nselle, Nnam, Abanyom and Akagu.

The carving of hard-stone to represent the human form is confined to a small area of less than 1,000 square kilometres on the right bank of the middle Cross River. Here, during 1961 and 1962, P. Allison recorded 295 stones which were shaped with varying degrees of elaboration to represent the human form; they are to be found at 26 main sites on land occupied by six formerly independent Ekoi ethnic subgroups. The most numerous pieces and also the most skilful and original are found on the lands of Nta (50 stones), Nselle (90) and Nnam (94). They are carved in basalt, whereas the Abanyom and Akagu stones are carved from a shelly limestone. The Nta and Nselle refer to their stones as *Akwanshi*, meaning 'the buried dead'.

The people of the *Akwanshi* speak distinct but related forms of an Ekoid Bantu language. In recent times, the affairs of each community were directed by the elders under whom the young men were organized in age-grade companies. There were also *Ntoon* or priest chiefs, whose function was mainly religious and ceremonial. The extent of the *Ntoon's* authority varied from a single village to the whole of the subgroup.

Allison tried to reconstruct the genealogy of the *Ntoon* priests for the Nta people, since he believed, with justifiable reasons, that the *Akwanshi* were memorials of the founders of the dynasty. It seems that the people were formerly organized as a large kingdom not unlike those of Bini and Yorubaland. The construction of the large and early *Akwanshi* burial memorials predicates the existence of such strong, centralized and large-scale socio-political systems, with a sufficient labour force at their command.

The origins of the *Akwanshi* may fall anywhere between the last two or three centuries of the first millennium of the Christian era, and the first two or three centuries of the second millennium, i.e. about the same time as Igbo-Ukwu. The onset of the trans-Atlantic slave trade would appear to have had an adverse effect on this state.

Early trade

As already noted, most of the Akan, Ewe, Gã-Adangme, Yoruba, Edo, Igbo and related groups as presently known were already occupying roughly the same parts of Lower Guinea in the eleventh–twelfth century and probably much earlier. The Yoruba, in particular, were by that time already urban dwellers, witness the excavated evidence of towns like Ife, Old Oyo and Ilesha. So also were the Edo as reflected by the excavations at Benin: others like the Igbo-Ukwu in Nigeria and Bono Manso in Ghana established sophisticated state systems.

These towns were distinguishable from other settlements in terms of their relative size, composition, social organization, structuring and functions. In time, they grew to possess a variety of specialized crafts producing goods manufactured for more than local consumption, as well as having strategically located and large-sized markets, placed at frequent intervals in relation to the resources on which they thrived.

Because of the size and more complex social, economic and political system of some towns, the inhabitants soon came to have divided or multiple loyalties, whereas the villages were more homogeneous with their single chief, council and shared agrarian experience. Indeed, the attainment of a critical level of technological and subsistence knowledge able to sustain a dense population, and such levels of functional specialization in economic organization as have been described above, must have encouraged long-distance trade of various kinds.

Among many early farming communities, polished stone axes (locally known in Ghana as *nyame akume*) were traded over distances of hundreds of kilometres. Greenstone axes from the Bibiani region are found over a large part of southern Ghana. The stone rasps of the Kintampo culture, which has produced the earliest evidence of agriculture practices in Ghana (around –1500), were made from a dolomitic marl which was evidently traded over substantial distances, since it has been found both on the Accra plains and in northern Ghana. At Kumasi a ground stone axe ‘factory’ has been excavated. At Rim near Ouahigouya, the late neolithic/Iron Age levels are associated with axe factory localities, and the site appears to have been a major centre for trading axes to areas lacking the raw material. In any case, the substantial distance covered by the dispersal of greenstone axes and rasps points more to long-distance trade than to a local exchange network.

There is evidence of a local trade in pottery in Ghana, as detected by the recognition of clays in the fabric of pots which are foreign to the areas in which the pots were found. Several of the distinctive wares at New Buipe were made from clay sources coming from anything up to 100 kilometres from the site. Pots from the upper region of Ghana were traded into the northern region, where little pottery was made locally.

The beginnings of long-distance trade in West Africa are linked with the exploitation of the above-mentioned stone and clay resources, as well as of metals. It seems reasonable to postulate the existence, from early Iron Age times, of a complicated and widespread network of long-distance trade radiating from a few central points located in the distinct ecological zones, and connecting coastal peoples and inland farming peoples, on the one hand, as well as people to the south and pastoralists in the north, on the other.

Conclusion

The attested presence of a wide variety of crafts points to the existence of a sophisticated technology, an accumulation of wealth, the institution of a ritual leadership, and participation in trade. The large amount of copper unearthed may have served as currency; the copper used in the bronzes was of trans-Saharan origin, while the considerable quantity of beads recovered may have been of Indian manufacture, with some perhaps from Venice, although +900 seems too early for postulated contacts with the Italian port. The nearest sources of copper envisaged are in the Azelik area (Takedda) of Aïr and Niôro in Mali. The quantity of copper items in southern Nigeria before +1300 indicates that trade was on a large scale and had been in existence for probably 500 years prior to that date.

A long-distance trade in luxury goods dependent upon social distinctions could have existed even outside local markets. In some places, regular trade developed in special items such as salt, cloth, metal, beads, pottery and stone tools from late neolithic/early Iron Age times. Even such regional trade may not always have created entirely new markets, but may rather sometimes have established more regular lines of communication between hitherto existing but non-periodic local markets. Regional trade in salt, for instance, dates back at least to the late Iron Age and was both from the Sahara to the Sudan and from the coast to the forest. Large portions of the Niger delta are too swampy and saline to support much agriculture; on the other hand, the hinterland lacks salt deposits and so both regions find it beneficial to exchange salt and dried fish for agricultural and animal surpluses.

The regional trade in beads has shown more of an east-west than a north-south orientation. One bead type, which has never been adequately identified but which was traded over very long distances round the Gulf of Guinea, was called *akori*.

Regional trading networks also developed around the centres of textile industry. These had attained considerable sophistication in the Igbo-Ukwu cultural area and persisted until recent times. For instance, in the sixteenth century, Benin people used types of cloth similar to that found at Igbo-Ukwu. However, the most important of the regional networks in the Igbo hinterland from Igbo-Ukwu times were apparently those covering iron and other metals and may have involved itinerant smiths.

18

The peoples of Upper Guinea: between Côte d'Ivoire and the Casamance

Linguistic and ethnic configuration

The inhabitants of the Upper Guinea region belong to three main language subgroupings of the Niger-Congo family: Mande, West Atlantic and Kwa.

Mande

By far the most secure and best known of these subgroupings is that of the Mande – a set of about 25 languages which stretches from Busa in Nigeria to Gambia in the west, and from Soninke in the north to Vai-Kono in the south. All Mande languages are divided into two groups – the northern (or north-western) and the southern (or south-eastern). The relative degrees of relationship are clear for many individual languages. The south-west subgroup of the north-western division includes languages such as Mende, Kpelle and Loma, spoken in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, whereas the northern subgroup of the same division embraces Soninke, Mandenka (Bambara, Malinka, Dyula, etc.), Soso-Yalunke, Vai-Kono, and some others. The southern division was until recently considered to consist of two separate subgroupings – the southern one, comprising Mano and a few other smaller languages in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, and the eastern one, which included a number of small isolated languages (Busa, Bisa, Samo) scattered in Burkina Faso, northern Benin and western Nigeria, but it is now established that these subgroups are closely related and therefore form only one group.

Mandenka has three exceptional features. These are its large number of speakers, its extensive geographical spread and its relative cohesion. The Mande-speaking area was the core of the early western Sudan states, of which the earliest, the Ghana empire, dates back to over a thousand years. According to oral tradition, Mande expansion into the Gambia took place during the reign of Sundiata in the thirteenth century and the trade settlements to the south date from the fourteenth century, if not earlier.

The geographical distribution of the Mande-speakers is open to various historical explanations. As the great bulk of the Mande is represented just by the Mandenka, it was for a long time held that the original home of all Mande was situated in the upper Senegal-Niger region in present-day Mali. It was further reasoned that all the other Mande-speakers were offshoots of successive migratory waves from this original



18.1 Language families of West Africa (simplified and with some major individual languages marked). (B. W. Andah)

centre. This seems to be true of later population movements (known also as the second Mande dispersal), which were mostly directed southwards and westwards.

On the other hand, it can be hypothetically presumed that the Mande (or Proto-Mande) started their migratory movements from their prehistoric home somewhere in the vicinity of Lake Chad and, after crossing the Niger, continued in a general westward or south-westward direction. These migrations must have taken place before those of the Gur (Voltaic) and Kwa-speaking peoples. Oral traditions of both Bisa (Busanse) and Mossi-Dagomba suggest that the former were in their present locations long before the foundation of the latter states. The traditions of Busa (in Nigeria) speak of their coming from the east.

All this indicates that the Mande-speaking peoples now living scattered in Burkina Faso, Benin and Nigeria are not the easternmost offshoots of a Mande expansion starting in the west, but rather residues of southern Mande migrations going from east to south-west, as indicated by their close linguistic relationship.

As for the chronological framework, Welmers suggested that the Mande languages represent the earliest break-off from the Niger-Congo family, placing this divergence at *c.* - 3300; the split between southern and northern-western Mande would have occurred in *c.* - 1600. However, since these dates are based on glottochronology, whose methods are coming increasingly under criticism by many linguists, they must be accepted with the utmost caution.

There is, however, no doubt that parts of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire were, during the period under review, already inhabited by speakers of Mande languages belonging to the southern division. Other Mande peoples (Vai, Kono, Mende, Soso, Kpelle/Guerze, Loma/Toma, etc.) have migrated coastwards in several waves only during the past five or six centuries and their movements are described in the next volume.¹

West Atlantic

As against the relative internal homogeneity of the Mande subgrouping, the West Atlantic grouping is more disparate, submerging historically significant subgroupings and stages like that of the Mel languages.

West Atlantic is a group of diverse languages spoken in the coastal area extending from the Senegal-Mauritanian border in the north-west to the Sierra Leone-Liberian border in the south-east. The one exception is Pular (or Fulfude), a language spoken by a savanna people extending from northern Senegal to the northern Cameroon and the Chad region. In marked contrast to Pular, the majority of the West Atlantic languages are spoken by relatively small and often isolated populations that range in numbers from upwards of 200,000 speakers (e.g. Dyula and Kisi) to as few as several hundred (e.g. Kobiana). Apart from certain common typological features, such as noun-class systems and verbal extension suffixes, there is little that distinguishes the entire group in any obvious way. Although small in number, these features are clear enough to permit postulating a unified, even if very broad, genetic group.

1. See Volume IV, Chapter 12.

Kwa

The Kwa occupy a belt of about 320 km average width extending about 2,240 km along the West African coast from Monrovia in Liberia in the west, through Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and an area between Benin and the eastern Niger delta. The four most important of the Kwa languages, in terms of number of speakers, are (1) Akan (Twi, Fanti), dominant in Ghana; (2) Ewe, dominant in Togo and Dahomey, and spoken also in south-eastern Ghana; (3) Yoruba, dominant in western Nigeria; and (4) Igbo, dominant in eastern Nigeria. They are all syllabic and have musical tones.² Detailed studies indicate that the greater part of the forest belt of West Africa, over a thousand miles from central Liberia to beyond the lower Niger in Nigeria, is occupied by peoples speaking a series of related language, with underlying similarities in vocabulary and structure. If these reflect a common proto-language, then linguistic evidence points here to an early cultural continuum over much of this forest belt, and subsequent diversification from an early but unknown date.

Historical-geographic evidence suggests that the forest was not easily penetrated by later peoples and, when such penetration occurred, it was not in the form of mass migrations. Rather such penetration was confined to small groups who, even if they exerted considerable cultural influence, were absorbed linguistically by the local populations. It was apparently only in the far west that northerners penetrated in large numbers, establishing warrior chiefdoms like those of the Mande of Sierra Leone, which carried the Mande language down to the coast.

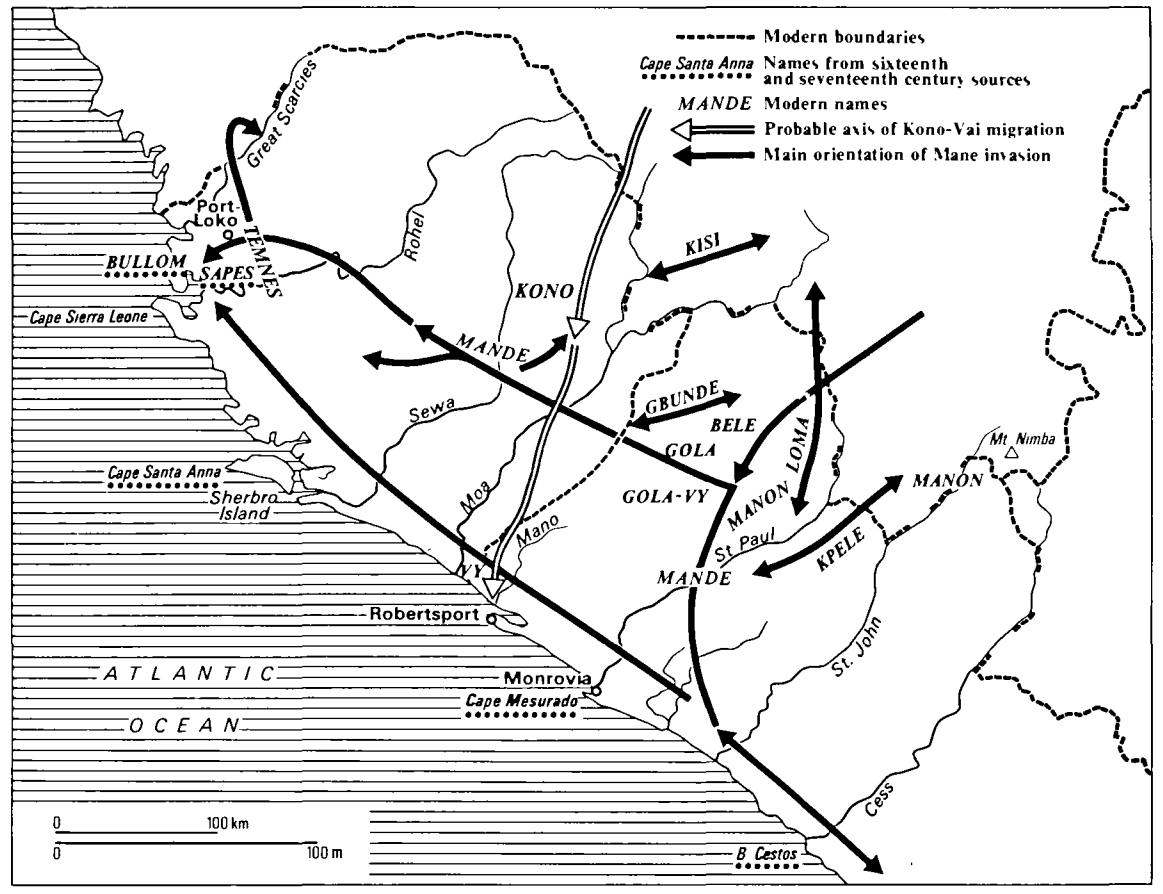
The role of the Mande

The major theme in the historical review of this region is that of a confrontation between two cultural traditions represented by the precursors of the Mel-speaking peoples of the coast and the expanding Mande-speaking peoples from the interior.

This region constituted a teeming frontier of immigration, population increase and intergroup competition, as interior peoples moved into the lowland forests of the littoral in search of land and trade. There is also little doubt that the infiltration of Mande-speaking groups from the east was a major contributing factor in this process.

Nevertheless, fundamental problems remain concerning the broader regional socio-cultural history of the pre-fifteenth century and in particular the late first millennium and the early part of the second. For example, it is not clear whether the Mane invasion took place in the fourteenth, fifteenth or sixteenth centuries. There is also disagreement as to the form it took and its impact on the local people. Was it a brief war, resulting in the intruders being assimilated by the local people, or a mass migration, with decisive and sometimes disastrous consequences for the indigenous groups? For instance, Rodney and Lamp attribute to this intrusion the destruction of the skills of the Sapes (which include the Bullom, Temne, Limba, Baga and Nalu, known today as speakers of Mel languages), who had great reputations as artists and craftsmen. On the other hand, the 'Manes' are also regarded as having contributed many new skills, such as techniques of ironworking, cotton-weaving and warfare. Livingstone suggested that the earliest Mande speakers to move west (placed by him in the

2. See Chapter 17 of this volume.



18.2 Population movements in the Upper Guinea region. (B. W. Andah)

fourteenth century) were primarily hunters and warriors and that subsequent waves of Mande migrants introduced rice cultivation, together with iron implements for intensive farming of forest areas by slash-and-burn methods. This process probably began on the fringe of the Guinea highlands and then spread slowly among the peoples of the lowland forest.

The still prevalent view is that these coastal peoples did not have much in the way of cultivation or iron-smelting until Mande-speaking peoples arrived among them, this occurring as recently as the sixteenth century.

A variant of this thesis traces the Mande advent as going much farther back in time and constituting even more of a civilizing force, since they are attributed with introducing agriculture, ironworking, sophisticated forms of socio-political system and long-distance trade and, with these, more complex economic systems and craft organizations.

Spreading outward from the coast are found first the remnants of the indigenous peoples. In Sierra Leone, these are the Bullom, closely associated with the Kisi and the Krim, the languages of all three being related. Along the present Liberian frontier live the Gola, speaking like the others one of the southern Mel languages.

Somewhat later came the closely related Baga and Temne, speaking a northern Mel language, settling a little inland. These Temne, along with the Nalu, Landuma and Cocoli further north, seem to represent a second, later layer, and have been called the 'Pre-Mandingas'. The Temne, Kisi, Limba, Baga and Landuma were thus all early inhabitants of the Futa Jallon. Finally displaced about the thirteenth century by the Mande-speaking Soso, they tended to move west and south to occupy more fertile land towards the coast. The Soso taking their place began in turn a move coastwards as they multiplied. The Baga, Landuma and Temne may have been one people until the Soso drove between them; the former, now occupying Guinea, are being gradually absorbed by the Soso. Their counterparts in Sierra Leone, the Temne, have kept their identity and have themselves absorbed members of coastal Bullom, as well as Loko, Koranko, Fulbe and even Soso further inland.

By focusing attention on aspects of economy, ecology and social structure, Murdock separated the area into two sections: (1) Senegambia, which represents a solid block of West Atlantic speakers, distinguished by matrilineality, intensive distribution of Sudanic crops at an early date and a savanna setting, favourable cultural contact and actual intrusion from the Sudan; and (2) the zone stretching from coastal Guinea to about the Sassandra river, inhabited by a cluster of people referred to as 'the Kru and peripheral Mande' who are historically and socially closely interrelated with one another, though speaking numerous dialects of the Mande, Kwa (Kru) and West Atlantic (Mel) languages.

An alternative and apparently more reasonable view argues that ironworking and agriculture were firmly established in parts of Upper Guinea before the advent of the Mandingo, which merely heralded the addition of Sudanic elements to the agricultural and socio-political systems of the indigenous populations.

The process of cultural contact was going on in this region for several centuries, long before the famous Mane invasion, and such contact involved the movement and intermingling of peoples of diverse languages and cultures into a sparsely inhabited coastal forest area. Most of the ethnolinguistic units that were reported on the coast

in European records between 1440 and 1700 exist today in much the same sequence, although their placement and territorial size may have altered to some degree. This does not mean that modern groups, because of the similarity of their names, languages or placement, are the direct genetic or cultural descendants of the ethnic cultures of the past, for this area has undergone vigorous change for centuries.

Senegambia

In the Senegambian region archaeological evidence indicates that the Loudia and Wolof sites in lower Casamance were occupied from as far back as the first millennium before the Christian era. It seems that the people came in from the east, since their pottery shares decorative techniques, like the wavy-line incision, with neolithic pottery widely distributed from Cap Verde to southern Algeria, and even beyond to Central Africa.

These coastal dwellers subsequently adapted to coastal life, as attested by the presence of mollusc remains; the people had started to cultivate wet rice between -200 and +200. Such new and radical adaptation was introduced by new settlers, possibly ancestors of the Dyula, who came from the south and displaced the relatively few previous occupants.

During the third major phase of occupation, sheep and/or goat domesticates were kept; cattle continued to be present, while fish was a most common element in the diet.

In the fourth and final phase, two new animal domesticates, pig and dog, appeared. Pottery is generally similar to that of the preceding period. The archaeological evidence, in particular, indicates that the Dyula came to occupy all of the alluvial valleys between the Casamance river delta and the Sondrougou river in the course of the three latter phases.

Apart from Casamance, the mouth of the Senegal river near St Louis and the Sine-Saloum delta (Joal, Gandoul and Bandiala) were similarly inhabited from about as early a period, if not earlier. Recent excavations have revealed Iron Age materials (hoe blades, beads, bracelets and pottery). There are general ceramic parallels between the Casamance and St Louis areas. In both Casamance and Cap Verde, decorative techniques assigned to the neolithic also continue into the early Iron Age.

Linguistic evidence places the centre of ancient Dyula dispersion to the south, in the coastal section of Guinea-Bissau, where the Mandyak and the Balante, both linguistically related to the Dyula, are found. Like the Dyula, these people are also wet-rice cultivators and employ the unique hand spade, the *kayando*.

Many recognizable features of Dyula culture were already present from the second period onwards. Groups lived on sandy ridges in or near alluvial valleys, just as they do today; middens contain pottery fragments and other refuse which compare with present Dyula material culture.

Over the past eighty years or so, several great complexes of stone circles have been discovered in the Senegambia region, to the north of the River Gambia, in an area of more than 30,000 square kilometres stretching from Fara-fenni, some 360 km from the river mouth, to as far east as Tambacounda in the Senegal. The earliest known megaliths consist of standing-stones and lines of lateritic blocks ranging between eight and twenty-four in number and up to 4 metres in height. The largest concentration

at Dialloubere consists of fifty-four circles, each circle measuring up to 8 metres across; circles are usually in twos and threes. The stones in any given circle are all of the same size, and are from 1 to 2 metres in height. In shape, the stones are generally rounded pillars. Most circles have a pair of stones oriented due east from them, and occasionally there are huge stones cut in the shape of a letter Y.

These monuments are burial grounds. The rows of adjoining circles were the cemeteries of dynasties of kings or priests, while the smaller groups were those of local chiefs or priests. The eastward orientation of the Y-shaped stone and pairs of outliers may indicate sun worship.

Pottery from these megaliths appears to parallel material found in the tumuli of the Rao and Sine, in the Sahelian regions of Senegal. So far, more than 4,000 mounds have been discovered, some as high as 5 metres and up to 40 metres across. Those excavated reveal multiple burials, with a profusion of grave goods, including gold and carnelian beads, iron weapons, ornaments of gold and copper and, in one grave, a gold pectoral. It is possible to date the emergence of metals, ornaments and other burial objects in this region to a period stretching from the fourth to the sixth century of the Christian era. The carnelian beads, however, come from sites subsequent to the eleventh century and point to a circulation of this material, probably from the Nile valley.

It is clear from the above that there were important contacts and connections between the western Sudan and Senegambia during this period of megalith-builders. The weight of evidence available suggests that the megaliths and related socio-cultural achievements were the work of the ancestors of people living in the area today – mainly Mande, Wolof and Fulbe. As far as is known, only the Dyula lived there at the time the circles were built. However, the fact that pottery found in some complexes (e.g. Wassu) differs considerably from that found in others (e.g. Fara-fenni) may indicate that many ethnic groups, but with identical cultures, were involved in these burials. Moreover, the variety of styles in the stone-carving argues for a development over a long period.

Guinea – Sierra Leone – Liberia

In Sierra Leone, man appears to have had easy access to caves and rock shelters located in the highland zone in the north-east. Excavations at Kamabai and Yagala (rock shelters less than 320 km north of Cape Mount) and at Yengema revealed iron-using phases in their later levels, dating from as early as the seventh or eighth century, although stone tools continued to be in use until at least the fourteenth century. Huge smelting sites are present in north-eastern Sierra Leone in Koranko country, but unfortunately there are no datings.

The two most recent levels of Kamabai have been dated to between the sixth to ninth and the sixth to tenth centuries. Pottery from these levels was markedly different from pottery recovered from smaller sites around Koidu and north-eastern Bo. At one site a partially vitrified crucible and a mould, apparently for lost-wax casting of brass, were found. Iron artefacts were retrieved together with chipped-stone tools from one such site. Industries analogous or even homologous to the lower and middle

Yengeman of Yengema cave were widespread in the eastern and southern provinces.

The fact cannot be gainsaid that there were contacts between the forest and savanna peoples of this part of the Upper Guinea region from very early times. Trade was particularly important as a means of contact and interaction. However, contrary to what some think, there is evidence for the flourishing of civilizations in the forest areas from early times. Among these are the steatite ancestor figures in Sierra Leone and Liberia, known as *nomoli* and *pomdo*, and the megaliths already alluded to above. Some scholars have suggested that both traditions were approximately contemporary with the introduction of iron, implying that iron and these traditions were introduced into the forest areas.

Whether pottery and ironworking were introduced or not into the forest region, the region between Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire manifested features of complex state organization long before recorded history. And these manifestations were largely independent in character of the civilization of the middle Niger region.

Liberian rain-forest 'early Iron Age' pottery shows striking similarities with early Iron Age pottery from other parts of West Africa. For example, the stamped ware found at sites in Mali, Senegal and Ghana show specific similarities in design elements on comparable vessel forms and ware types.

The Liberian pottery finds fall into distinguishable groups, which appear to have validity in cultural analysis. In regard to the ethnographic materials, the Mandingo-Lomo-Kpelle-Mano wares are sufficiently alike to form a genetically related subtradition. This is, in effect, a continuum of traits with the most varied and complex in the Mandingo ware and the simplest in the Mano ware. In terms of designs and vessel forms, the Mandingo are the most varied and complex and the Mano the least. This concurs with the culturally more sophisticated position of the Mandingo of the nuclear Mande and the others, the so-called peripheral Mande.

The known examples of *pomtan* and *nomoli*, the names usually applied to a variety of stone sculptures, are numbered in thousands and have been found over an area stretching from Sherbro Island to the Kisi country of Guinea and from western Liberia westwards to the Temne country. The occurrence of the carvings appears to be more or less continuous throughout the area, although there are wide stylistic differences between the *pomtan* (sing. *pomda*) of Kisi and the *nomoli* found in Sierra Leone. The area is populated by agricultural peoples who cultivate rice as their main crop, but who belong to two different language groups. The Kisi people to the north, and the Bullom-Sherbro on the coast speak languages of the same group, but they differ basically from the language of the Mande and Kono, who occupy the country dividing them.

Some scholars have claimed that the first *nomoli* were made in imitation of clay figurines of the western Sudan, the tradition of making *nomoli* having been introduced from the western Sudan at the same time as some distinctive pottery, as well as iron, first appeared at Kamabai – sometime in the sixth-seventh centuries. This view disregards the fact that wooden sculptures very similar to the stone objects (and not clay ones) are present in this region, and that the knowledge needed to make the stone sculptures may have been acquired through first working in wood.

The majority of the sculptures were made of talc or steatite, with smaller numbers

in chlorite schist and amphibolite and a few in hard rocks such as granite, dolerite and sandstone. Their great abundance and very wide distribution as well as the fact that stone and wood were used instead of clay, together with the variety of styles, point to a home-grown, rather than a foreign-exported, tradition which blossomed in these diverse forms in response mainly to local cultural and ecological pressures and differences. In the face of the available evidence, it is more logical to accept that the *nomoli* were largely the independent achievement of people who had been living in the area for a very long time. It is also possible that this art tradition was exported northwards from the southern source. Indeed, it may well not be an accident that a stone-sculpturing tradition is found in various other parts of the Guinea region, such as at Esie in Yorubaland, and *akwanshi* among the Ekoi of the Cross river region.

The vast majority of sculptures of all types represent the male human figure, although the genitals are seldom portrayed. The typical *nomoli* is usually between 6 and 8 inches high and the *pomdo* between 3 and 6 inches, although a few specimens over 12 inches high have been collected in all parts of the area. A few bulbous stylizations of the female form also occur. Finally, well-sculptured human figures of both sexes are found, although the males are more numerous. These show considerable elaboration in the form of head-gear or dressed hair, beads and ornamental body-scars. The more elaborate figures and groups occur rarely in the collections made in the Kisi country of Guinea and probably derive mainly from the southern Kisi of Sierra Leone and from the Kono country.

The popular belief throughout the area is that the carvings are of divine origin, although the Kisi elders agree that the *pomtan* were made by their forefathers at some very remote period and are always the manifestation of some particular ancestor. Among the Mande, on the other hand, the *nomoli* are significantly connected with the old landowners, and not with their own ancestors.

Indeed, linguistic evidence seems to suggest that, from about 2,500 years ago, the southern Sierra Leone and northern Liberia region, and part of adjacent Guinea, were occupied by Mel-speakers, who were probably expanding at the expense of the Kwa. At about the same time, Mande languages were spreading from a heartland in the Mali-Guinea border area and were differentiating. One branch of Mande ancestral to Kono-Vai, Koranko, Malinke and others spread north, eventually expanding widely in the Sudan. Later on, the Kono-Vai branch spread south-westwards, separating Kisi and Gola from the other Mel language. Subsequently – and quite recently – another Mande group, already internally distinct, expanded north-westwards, splitting Kisi from Gola, if they were not already physically separated, and cutting across the Kono-Vai salient. This north-westward thrust of Mande (known as Mande Loko) was subsequently divided by the eastward expansion of Temne-speaking people north of the area.

There is little evidence of a direct connection between the movement of the Vai (who speak a northern Mande language) towards the coast and that of the Ligbi towards eastern Côte d'Ivoire, despite linguistic similarities. More probably, the Vai entered present-day Sierra Leone in company with the Kono and it seems that the Kono and Vai, together with speakers of the now extinct 'Dama' language, formed

a continuous band from eastern Sierra Leone to the sea, cutting off the Gola and Kisi from other Mel-speakers.

According to recent research, the northern Mande-speaking groups did not arrive in the forest regions suddenly, but rather in a gradual process and in small groups; there is also a growing awareness that this must have happened much earlier than originally thought. The role of long-distance trade in stimulating major socio-political development, as well as the influence that may have been exercised in this respect by the main purveyors of the trade, i.e. the Vai, seems to be significant. It is now recognized as a real possibility that the Vai came into Liberia many centuries before the fifteenth century. The development of Kono-Vai civilization was a very gradual process receiving cross-fertilization from various directions and at various times. The movement through which the Vai and Kono were set in place was not simply a quick incursion dated to the fifteenth or sixteenth century, for historical processes which last decades or centuries can hardly be explained in terms of a single battle or the action of one leader. Equally, new trade routes are chiefly created by a gradual evolution, not by a sudden military conquest.

What we are concerned with rather is the movement of peoples for political or economic reasons extending over a period of centuries. The outcome was the modification of populations through intermarriage, the transformation of social structures and the expansion or regression of languages. The number of Vai-speakers was increased by intermarriage with the indigenous population – not only Mel-speakers but also the Die, who, according to nineteenth-century sources, used to occupy a larger area on the coast. Thus the Vai ceased to be regarded as complete strangers.

There accordingly appears to have been contact from a very early stage between the Sudanic and the Guinea forest peoples, leading to some drift southward and eastward of Sudanic peoples like the Soninke and Mande into parts of the lowland forest regions. It is very doubtful, however, that these came in such superior numbers as to replace the indigenous peoples. Indeed, more often than not, the indigenous peoples were not simple Kwa hunger-gatherers or fishers, as has often been postulated. Nor is it true that both the indigenous people and the immigrants usually remained culturally stagnant or even retrogressed, owing to their isolation and the unfavourable ecology. The historical facts rather reveal a continuous dynamic interaction of the groups inhabiting the region, resulting in distinctive regional modifications.

Some relationship existed between ethnic stock, language affiliation and cultural type, but it was not necessarily as close or as regular as has been posited by some writers. Widely spaced coastal peoples such as the Wolof, Sereer, Dyula, Nalu, Temne, Kisi and Gola may represent remnants of ancient inhabitants of the region but these did not constitute an 'ancient primitive' forest culture of an original Negro stock that could be said to have inhabited the whole of western Africa in prehistoric times. Nor were the Kwa-speaking peoples of south-eastern Liberia and western Côte d'Ivoire the most primitive of these groups. Indeed, the bulk of archaeological and related evidence available so far shows conclusively that intensive agriculture, large centralized monarchies, occupational guilds and hereditary classes, military organizations and trade and market systems were all features of life among many of these peoples well before the earliest Sudanic intrusions and influences were

experienced, and certainly between the seventh and eleventh centuries.

The archaeological and ethnological evidence likewise indicates that rice was a more important and intensively cultivated crop along the West Atlantic coast than either cotton, millet or sorghum, to which proponents of the primacy of the Sudanic region seem to attach undue importance and which may have been introduced by northern immigrants or through contact with the north.

Southern Liberia and western Côte d'Ivoire appear to be the locus of a sharp division of these agricultural traditions. The Bandama river, which separates the Baule and the Kru peoples, is also the northernmost boundary of intensive yam cultivation. Where yams appear in agriculture north of this boundary, their harvesting is not associated with the elaborate ritual found among the Agni and other Kwa-speaking peoples farther to the south.

Whereas north of the Saint-Paul river and eastward along the fringes of the forest area rice continues as a basic crop in intensive agriculture for all the peoples of the central West Atlantic region, important Sudanic cultigens such as millet, cotton and sorghum have scarcely intruded farther west than the Guinea-Liberian border, or farther south than the Temne, Mande, Koranko and Kono of Sierra Leone. In the north-western province of Liberia, these crops are not planted by the De, Gola and western Kpelle, except in instances where Mandingo peoples have settled in relatively recent times or where this influence is known to have obtained over long periods in the past.

Conclusion

The current state of our knowledge of the history of the Upper Guinea region in the period covered by this volume may be considered as unsatisfactory. What we have presented here is no more than a provisional attempt to collect and discuss the available findings of the archaeological and linguistic research hitherto conducted in the region. But there are still more gaps than hard facts in our knowledge and we are dealing mostly with hypotheses that need further corroboration. This situation calls for a more systematic research strategy based on the collaboration of specialists in various fields. Equally important, however, is a new and unbiased approach that will enable us to see the history of the Upper Guinea peoples in a perspective presenting them not merely as subjects of outside influence, be it from the north or later from the south, but as active participants in the historical process.

A map of seventh-century Ethiopia would not have a definite outline. On it would be marked the small number of towns and regions mentioned by Cosmas Indicopleustes in his *Christian Topography*, written in about the middle of the sixth century. This gives first-hand information about regions bordering on the Nile, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. It tells us, for example, that 'from Axum . . . to the lands of incense called Berbera which, lying on the ocean coast, are to be found not close to but far from Sasou, the furthest region of Ethiopia, it is a journey of some forty days'.

Cosmas also wrote about merchants in their hundreds who travelled all over these regions, trading cattle, salt and iron in exchange for 'gold nuggets'. There was also trade in spices, incense and cassia. The two big cities of the time were Axum and its port Adulis. We have no reason to think that the general situation was fundamentally different in the seventh century. Having reached its zenith in the preceding century, the kingdom of Axum had no doubt lost none of its power. At the beginning of the eighth century, a Caliph of the Ummayyad dynasty had the four kings of the world drawn on the walls of his palace in *Ḳuşayr 'Amra*, in Jordan. These were the sovereigns of Visigothic Spain, Byzantium, Persia and Axum. This testifies to their importance, even if the Caliph in question claims to have conquered all of them.

The decline of the kingdom of Axum

The kingdom of Axum enjoyed a period of exceptional prestige during the reign of Ezana in the fourth century, its wealth being derived from cattle-breeding, agriculture and, above all, from trading, especially in ivory. The kingdom maintained trade relations with the Mediterranean world and several places around the Indian Ocean through its port of Adulis. This trade contributed greatly to the economic development of the country and, through the various activities that resulted from it, led to the growth of towns.

As early as the third century, the necessities of trade encouraged the creation of coinage, and these coins have given us the names of some twenty kings for the whole of the Axumite period, most of whom, from Endybis to Hataza, would otherwise have remained unknown.

The beginning of the seventh century marked a turning-point for the kingdom of



19.1 The Horn of Africa. (I. Hrbek)

Axum. Another age was to begin, that of its decline, for which documentary evidence is rarer, although this does not mean that it is non-existent. The Axumite towns continued for an as yet undetermined period. The coins found on the sites at Axum, Matara and Adulis tell us the names of the kings who reigned during the seventh century and certainly part of the eighth: Ella-Gabaz, Anaeb, Armah, Yathlia, Za Ya-Abiyo, La Madhen, Wazena, Ghersem and Hataza. Their heads on the coins are surrounded by inscriptions in Ge'ez, which is still the liturgical language today.

In about 615, during the reign of King Armah, or more probably that of his father, Ella-Tsaham, a significant event took place. Some followers of Muḥammad whose lives were threatened found refuge at the court of Axum, where they were favourably received. When the chiefs of Mecca, enemies of the Prophet, asked that the fugitives should be handed back to them, the king refused to satisfy their demands, considering that the religion of his guests was not without resemblance to the Christian faith which he practised. In addition, the law of hospitality had to be observed.

The seventh century marked the birth and growth of Islam and its gradual spread along the edge of the Red Sea. The favourable attitude of the first Muslims towards the Axumite kingdom lasted only a relatively short time and there were increasing clashes. The Axumites made incursions on to the Arab coast, provoking retaliatory action from the Muslims. In the eighth century, the Muslims occupied the Dahlak Islands, which were part of the empire of Axum. Adulis, the Axumite port, was destroyed in about the eighth century and trading activities, which until then had been under the control of the Axumite king, were brought to a complete halt. As regards the events taking place in the interior of the country, however, history remains silent or almost silent.

The Bēdja

One of the factors which contributed to the waning of the kingdom of Axum from the seventh century onwards and its disappearance in the eighth was without doubt the invasion of the northern regions of Ethiopia by the Bēdja. One of the most powerful of the Bēdja groups, the Zanāfidj, invaded the Eritrean plateau through the Barka valley.

During preceding periods, the Bēdja people had organized themselves into several 'kingdoms', occupying a vast area from Axum to Upper Egypt. The first mention of the Bēdja (or Bega) appears in an inscription from the third century made by an Axumite king and copied in the sixth century by Cosmas.

The occupation of the north of Ethiopia by the Bēdja – hence the present name of Begemder, Bēdja country – no doubt resulted from the fact that the power of Axum had weakened somewhat, but the pressure that the Bēdja were to exercise from then on was to hasten the decline of Axumite power.

From the ninth to the eleventh centuries, the only sources concerning the Bēdja are Arab authors, first among them being al-Ya'qūbī (died in 897) and secondly Ibn Ḥawqal and al-Uṣwānī.

Starting from the area near the Nile, al-Ya'qūbī lists and gives the position of five Bēdja 'kingdoms', going from the Nile towards the sea and then southwards. The first



19.2 Coinage of King Armah, seventh century of the Christian era. (Ministry of Culture, Ethiopia)

19.3 Gospel book of Abba-Guerima showing the figure of St Mark (eleventh century). (Ministry of Culture, Ethiopia)



kingdom, the nearest to the Muslim country of Aswān, was *Naḳis*, which was inhabited by several small tribes, whose names are listed but have not yet been deciphered. These tribes lived near the second kingdom, *Baḳlīn* or *Taḥlīn*, in the Eritrean Sahel, the Rora plateau and the middle valley of the River Barakat. To the east of the *Baḳlīn* lived the *Bāzīn*, whose descendants are probably the present-day Kunama, who are called *Bazen* by their neighbours. The kingdom of the *Djarin* stretched from Bādī' (Massawa) as far as the country of the *Baḳlīn* towards the Barakat. The last group consisted of the *Ḳata'a*, whose territory extended from Bādī' to Faykun or Fankun. These *Ḳata'a* were Christians and found themselves under the influence of the *Nadḡāshī*. Arab merchants traded with these people and gradually brought about their conversion to Islam.

In Eritrea and northern Tigré, there are still traditions recalling these ancient peoples under the legendary names of Rom and Balaw (and sometimes Belew Kelew, mostly in the Chimezana). Place-names also record their existence, especially that of the *Belew*, who five or six centuries ago extended their supremacy as far as the coastal area. The Beni 'Amer, who today lead a nomadic existence in northern Eritrea and Sudan, are the descendants of the former Bēdja.

Under the pressure of these warlike Bēdja groups, Axum's kings and leading citizens left Axum for more southerly areas that were free from the perils of the invaders.

As already stated, at the start of the seventh century the political situation around the Red Sea changed almost completely. The Byzantine empire, itself threatened by Persian conquests, shrank back. The Persians were increasingly in evidence and established bases on the African coast.

Ethiopia was the ally of Byzantium, whose power was being weakened. Little by little, the Arabs pushed the Byzantines back. In Egypt they won complete victories, while in Ethiopia the successors of Armah were isolated. The country was then enveloped by a kind of darkness lit only by faint historical glimmers. No inscription has been discovered for this period of the seventh and eighth centuries, apart from one rather clumsily carved inscription on the base of a throne in Axum. It is in Ge'ez and seems to be of a later period. It mentions a certain *Haḡānī* Dan'el (a pretender to the throne?) who rebelled against his sovereign and forbade the king access to his city.

On the threshold of the second millennium

During the second half of the tenth century, there were a number of serious events which affected the life of the country.

The *History of the Patriarchs* mentions a certain queen of the *Banū al-Hamwiya*, from the south, who sacked the Axumite area and destroyed its churches. She drove out the king, who appealed to the Coptic patriarch, Cosmas, through the Nubian king Djirdjīs/George, asking him to send a metropolitan. As we know, the see of Axum had been held since the fourth century by a Coptic ecclesiastic from Alexandria. In the fifth century, Ethiopia embraced the Monophysite doctrine, adopting the Egyptian liturgy.

Driven from power, the unfortunate king took refuge in Shoa feeling his exile to be the result of divine anger provoked by the dismissal of a bishop. After the probable

intervention of the Nubian king, *Djirdjīs*, the patriarch appointed a certain Abba Daniel as bishop of Axum. Before he could take up his duties, however, the king, who, in about 970 to 980, was still fighting the implacable queen, died.

At about the same time, Ibn *Ḥawḳal* wrote (c. 977) concerning the events taking place in Ethiopia:

Regarding the land of the Abyssinians, it has been governed for many years now by a woman. She killed the king of the Abyssinians, who was known by the title of *Ḥaḏānī*. She has hitherto ruled in complete independence over her own country and the areas surrounding the land of the *Ḥaḏānī* in the south of Abyssinia.

Traditional accounts are contradictory in what they say about this queen. Some say that she was the queen of the Falashas (Ethiopian Jews) and a daughter of their chief, Gideon. Others state that she was the granddaughter of the king *Wedem-Asfere* and still others claim that she was the daughter known as *Mesobe-Work* of the last Axumite king, *Delnaad*.

Conti Rossini suggests that the word *Al-Hamwiya* in the title of the queen be read as *Al-Damūta*, which might indicate the region of *Damot*, to the south and south-east of the Blue Nile, as her land of origin. These events could then be interpreted as a reaction by the small tribes in the interior of Ethiopia against the expansion by the Axumite Christian kings into the south of the country.

Ethiopian histories for this dark period contain royal genealogies. Most of these are found in the *Chronicle of the reign of Emperor Menelik*, written at the start of the twentieth century by a church dignitary, *Neboure-Id Guèbrè Sellasié*, but this table of royal successions starting from the sixth century is obviously apocryphal. It was composed at a later date, but might still contain a few grains of truth.

Other traditions relate that the last king, *Delnaad*, could have taken refuge in a country in the south and that his daughter married a prince from *Bugena*, the region near the *Lasta*. This people from the *Lasta*, who were to play a role in the subsequent history of Ethiopia, belonged to the earlier inhabitants, the *Agaw*, who for centuries had been living in the south-west of the country.

The legend of *Mesobe-Work*, who married *Mera Tekle Haymanot*, the first king of the new *Zague* dynasty, according to the traditional genealogy, is a romanticized version of an episode which really occurred. Be that as it may, after the glories of the Axumite period, this new dynasty supplanted the old dynasty of the *Ezanian* family and established itself in the centre of Ethiopia.

After so much destruction, the new dynasty set up its own political system once it had settled in the central provinces, yet it retained many of Axum's traditions and cultural traits. This new reign reached its zenith in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as witnessed by the great kings of the *Zague* dynasty, of whom the most famous is *Lalibela*.

Literature

Ethiopian literature is biblical and Christian in origin. From the fourth century, the *Ge'ez* language predominated at court as well as in the church. The translations,

which occupy a large place in this literature, are written in this language.

The first books were translations of the Bible, done in the monasteries established from the end of the fifth century onwards. The New Testament was translated from the version approved by the Patriarch of Antioch by Syrian Monophysite ecclesiastics who took refuge in Ethiopia in the fifth and sixth centuries.

In the case of the Old Testament, the Ethiopians also translated several books considered by other churches to be apocryphal. These include the *Book of Enoch*, the *Book of Jubilees*, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the *Shepherd* of Hermas and the *Apocalypse* of Esdras. It is noteworthy that these apocryphal books have come down to us in their full version in the Ge'ez language alone, while only fragments survive in other languages. In those dark ages Ethiopia thus made one of its major contributions to world literature.

The list of translations also includes theological treatises, among which were the *Qerillos*, according to a compilation made by Saint Cyril of Alexandria; the *Rule of Pachomius*, Saint Pachomius being the founder of eastern monasticism; and the *Physiologos*, a collection of semilegendary notions on animals, plants and minerals, with moral conclusions.

These texts were all apparently translated before the seventh century, but some versions of them were recopied during the period under study, since during that time – from the seventh to the eleventh century – Christianity continued to extend its influence primarily, if not exclusively, through monasticism, which is perhaps the most important phenomenon in the history of that obscure period.

The fact that no original works have come down to us from that period does not in itself mean that those centuries were totally lacking in original intellectual activity. Indeed, it seems to have been then that the seeds were sown for that flowering of literature which began in the fourteenth century and of which E. Cerulli has rightly observed: 'The artistic maturity of these writings in no way represents a literature in its infancy; and the sobriety of language presupposes a discipline which cannot be rapidly acquired without a long tradition.'

Architecture and the arts

According to several traditions, the first monasteries in the north of the country were established in the fifth and sixth centuries.

The 'Nine Saints' (Teseatu Kidusan), who are traditionally said to have come from the Byzantine world, are seen as being the originators of monastic life proper. They settled in remote places in the Axum region. One of their oldest foundations is to be found east of Adwa on a high rocky platform in the Tigré mountains. It is called Debre-Damo.

A church, which has recently been restored, was established there in very remote times. Specialists date it to about the tenth century, but tradition holds that the first church at Debre-Damo was built in the sixth century on the initiative of King Gebra-Masqal, son of Kaleb.

The method of construction remains faithful to Axumite architectural tradition, in which stone and wood are used together. The doors and windows have the same

frames as can be seen, for example, on the giant stelae of Axum, with the projecting butt-ends of beams as well as the alternately projecting and recessed parts which are one of the features of Axumite architecture.

Although this church was the first to show what the buildings erected around the tenth century were like, it is not the only example of the architecture of this period. Excavations undertaken in the 1970s have brought to light other churches in northern Ethiopia which archaeological evidence links to that distant age of the Axumite decline. The churches in question, cited here as evidence of this particular aspect of history, are those of Zarema, Agowo and Berakit.

The church in Zarema, east of Atsbi on the eastern Tigré plateau, is dedicated to Saint George (Kadus Ghiorghis) and is probably a latter-day survival of the square-shaped, colonnaded buildings of the Axumite period. The carvings on the wooden ceilings, above the aisles, are of exceptional interest on account of both their composition and the technique used. This carved work derives directly from the decorative Mediterranean art of the seventh and eighth centuries, and especially from that of Coptic Egypt. It bears no trace of Islamic decorative art. The original date of the church of Zarema-Ghiorghis appears to go back to the ninth or tenth century.

The church of Agowo is to be found in the same area. It is a small basilica of stone and wood built against a cliff, under a rocky overhang. As in Axumite buildings, the walls show the butt-ends of beams, and the ceiling of the central nave has wooden panels, which, however, are not decorated as they are at Debre-Damo. This church bears the name of Tcherqos (Cyriac). Its oldest parts probably date back to the eleventh century, but it was restored at a later date.

The churches of Debre-Damo, Zarema-Ghiorghis and Agowo-Tcherqos are churches that are conventional constructions. By contrast, a large number of cave churches are to be found in northern Ethiopia, where the roots of Christianity go very deep. The churches originated in the period under review; they have close links with Axumite architecture and some of them are remarkably well executed.

A large group of churches are to be found in the Guerealta area, to the north of Mekele. Other churches are to be found all over the neighbouring districts of Tembien, Amba Senayt and Atsbi. A total of about 120 rock churches have been listed in these areas. Among the oldest are the hypogea of Degum-Sellassié in Guerealta, which have been dated to as far back as the tenth century. Certain archaeological considerations could lead to their being attributed a date about two centuries earlier.

Some 20 kilometres from the Degum-Sellassié site is the church of Maryam of Berakit. This is a remarkable example of Ethiopian rock art. It has been hewn out of a rocky eminence in the middle valley and it is regarded as being the rock equivalent of a kind of very distinctively Axumite basilica. Its shape can be compared with the constructed church at Debre-Damo.

There can be no doubt that the first thing striking one on seeing a church of this kind is its relationship with Axumite architecture. The two areas are geographically close and there are extant Axumite remains. Then, in terms of architecture, there are several features which are shared with Axumite tradition, such as the smallness of the proportions; the characteristic basilica plan like that of the small churches of the sixth and seventh centuries at Enda-Tcherqos near Axum, and at Matara, Tokonda

and Kohayto, the flat ceilings, the pillars and the capitals. These features suggest that a church like that at Berakit should be ascribed a date close to the Axumite period.

In several old buildings, including those discussed in this chapter, carving is to be found, chiefly on the ceilings, capitals and arches.

In the church of Debre-Damo, carved decorations chiefly represent animals such as lions, antelopes, zebras, snakes, camels, elephants, buffaloes, goats, donkeys, giraffes and leopards, as well as imaginary animals, plant motifs and geometrical shapes. The cross is often the central motif, surrounded by interlaced designs and palmettes. The artists of remote antiquity knew all the different types of ornamentation used in the Mediterranean countries, including Coptic Egypt. The church of Zarema-Ghiorghis is among the most decorated of the ancient buildings in northern Ethiopia.

There are no wall paintings in these churches at the present time. It may be asked whether such paintings used to decorate their walls in ancient times, as is the case with the later churches like that of Beta-Maryam in Lalibela, but the walls of the oldest known churches today bear no trace of them. The small size of the walls seems to have left very little space for painted decoration. Even so it is possible that such decoration did exist at one time. Indeed, there is the eyewitness account, recorded by al-Ṭabarī, of a woman in Muḥammad's entourage who went to Axum in the seventh century and who, on her return to Medina, remembered with admiration the 'marvellous paintings on the walls' of the cathedral. However, no painting, not even a trace, has survived from these ancient times.

With regard to the manuscripts, several ancient books were known to have been translated from the fifth or sixth century onwards, but it is difficult to state definitely whether these manuscripts were illuminated, since none of them seems to have withstood the destructive action of time, apart from two beautiful gospel books preserved in the old monastery of Abba-Guerima, (see 19.3 on page 273) near Adwa in Tigré. The illuminations decorating some of the pages of these manuscripts bear some resemblance to the Byzantine art of Syria.

20

Ethiopia's relations with the Muslim world

The relations which, from earliest times, had linked the populations of the two shores of the Red Sea, Arabs and Ethiopians,¹ began to change with the rise of Islam, since they then came to be expressed in terms of relations between Christians and Muslims.

The traditions collected in the biographies of the Prophet Muḥammad record various episodes in the history of the early contacts of nascent Islam with Ethiopia, the most important of these being the emigration of Dja'far ibn Abī Ṭālib, cousin of Muḥammad and brother of the future Caliph 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who went to the court of the *negus* with other Muslims in order to escape the hostilities of the Kurayshites. According to some traditions, he succeeded in converting the *negus* but the latter, to avoid the hostility of his Christian subjects, concealed his conversion.

This action of Dja'far may perhaps have later inspired the claims of various princes and leaders of Ethiopia and Somalia to be descended from members of Abī Ṭālib's family, as we shall see further.

Many other traditions generally refer to the Ethiopian Bilāl² and the Prophet's predilection for him and people of the same origin – for example, the saying 'Who brings an Ethiopian man or an Ethiopian woman into his house, brings the blessing of God there.'

This affection for the Ethiopians also gave rise to some opuscula of Arabic literature. There is the work of Ibn al-Djawzī (died in 1200), with the pompous title 'The lightening of the darkness on the merits of the Blacks and Ethiopians' (*Tanwīr al-ghabash fi faḍl al-Sūdān wa l-Habash*). The Egyptian polyhistorian al-Suyūṭī (died in 1505) wrote a special treatise entitled 'The raising of the status of the Ethiopians' (*Raf' sha'n al-Hubshān*), which he later summarized in his other work 'Flowers of the thrones on the history of the Ethiopians' (*Azhār al-'urūsh fi akhbār al-Ḥubūsh*). Another work of this kind is 'The coloured brocade on the good qualities of the Ethiopians' (*Al-Tirāz al-mankūsh fi maḥāsin al-Ḥubūsh*), written in 1583 by Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Bākī al-Bukhārī al-Makkī.

It became fashionable to insert in these works one or more chapters on Ethiopian words which are supposed to occur in the Revelation, i.e. in the Qoran and also in the *ḥadīths*, the traditional accounts of the Prophet's deeds and sayings.

1. See Chapter 16 of Volume II.
2. See Chapter 26 of this volume.

The Muslim settlement on the Dahlak Islands

Relations between the nascent Muslim state and Ethiopia were not always of a friendly character. Throughout the seventh century, the Red Sea remained firmly in Ethiopian hands and the Muslims gained the upper hand only gradually. In 702, the Ethiopians attacked Ḥidjāz for the last time and their fleet occupied Djidda for a while. As a retaliation for this attack, the Arabs occupied and destroyed Adulis and established themselves on the Dahlak Islands in the Gulf of Masāwa, opposite Adulis. These islands afforded them the possibility of controlling the sea traffic of Ethiopia, which was one of the main resources of the Axum state. From the second half of the eighth century, no more Ethiopian naval raids are mentioned and the same is true of Ethiopian seafaring in general. It seems that the Arabs destroyed the Ethiopian navy, which appears on the scene again only in the fourteenth century.

During these centuries, the Muslims exercised full control over seaborne trade on the Red Sea, thereby increasing the isolation of Ethiopia.

The occupation of Dahlak took place early in the Umayyad period and the islands were also used as a place of political exile. Subsequently, under the Abbasids, the islands served as a base for ensuring a safe sea voyage for the pilgrims to the Holy Places, at a time when the Red Sea was infested by pirates.

At the beginning of the tenth century, an independent Muslim principality was established on the Dahlak Islands. This state played a highly important role in the economic history of Ethiopia as well as in the spread of Islam in this region.³

On the Dahlak sultanate as well as on the degree of Islamic culture of its inhabitants, a rich source of documentation exists in the form of more than 200 Arabic inscriptions found on the main island, Dahlak Kabir. The oldest of these inscriptions is dated 911 and the most recent bears the date of 1539.

Alongside these documents testifying to the continuous presence of the Arabs, the tradition that is widespread along the African coast from the Gulf of Masāwa to that of Djibouti must not be neglected. This tradition attributes to the *Furs* (Persians) the construction of monuments, which were generally large cisterns for the collection of water and remains of which can still be seen in Dahlak Kabir and Adal. This may be evidence of the presence of Persian traders on the African coast, or it may document the employment of Persian engineers for these structures, given the renown acquired by the Persians for their water storage and distribution works.

The Muslim states of southern Ethiopia

The African coast of the Red Sea thus kept its old function in the traffic to the Indies, although within the new economic system of the Islamic world. Very soon the Muslim merchants pushed forward from the coast into the neighbouring regions of Ethiopia in search of merchandise for their commerce.

While the Christian state of Axum prevented the wider spread of Islam in the north, its development in the south of Ethiopia was very different. Here, too, it set out from the sea along the natural route leading from the Gulf of Djibouti through the depression

3. See Chapter 3 of this volume.

of the valley of the River Ḥawāsh to the richest regions of the south and west of the Ethiopian plateau. Once again, the spread of Islam followed the trade routes; indeed, even today *naggadie*, which in Amharic means 'merchant', typically means 'Muslim' in the language of the Oromo (Galla) of southern Ethiopia.

Various southern Ethiopian populations, from the coast of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden up to the Blue Nile, were thus converted to Islam. As a result, various Muslim sultanates were formed, and were dominated by a hereditary aristocracy which purported to be of Arab origin, while the mass of the population was Ethiopian and probably belonged to the Cushite family of the Sidamas.

The first of these sultanates was that of Dāmūt, which exercised its hegemonic sway as far as Ifāt. It is difficult to locate precisely this sultanate, because today Dāmūt is a region north of the Blue Nile and south of Godjam. It seems that Dāmūt originally designated a territory in the south-west of Ethiopia in the sector nearest to the Blue Nile. It was soon attacked and conquered by the *negus* of Christian Ethiopia; its inhabitants, called Walasma, then emigrated further east and settled in Ifāt, where they founded another sultanate.

The sultanate of Shoa, which, in its turn, exercised sway over Muslim southern Ethiopia, comprised at least the eastern zone of present Shoa. It was governed by a dynasty of sultans, who claimed descent from the famous Banū Makḥzūm of Mecca. The names of the sultans are evidence of the use of an Ethiopian Semitic language.

The Makḥzūmi dynasty ruled over Shoa at least from the year 896-7 and its sovereigns succeeded each other for four centuries until 1285, when the last sultan and his family were deposed and murdered by the sultan of Ifāt.

Among the names of the Makḥzūmi sultans that have been preserved, it is worth noting some that appear to be characteristic, such as Girāmgaz'i, which means 'terrific lord', while Dil-gāmis can be interpreted as 'victorious buffalo' and Ḥarb-ar'ad means 'terror of the spears'; all these correspond to the type of regal name common in Christian Ethiopia. It suffices to mention Negus Sayfa Ar'ad, 'terror of the swords'.

It should also be noted that women appear to have had some importance in the exercise of political power in the sultanate of Shoa; this is more consistent with Ethiopian custom than with the official position in other Muslim countries.

The internal history of Shoa, as it emerges in the *Chronological Repertory*, consists of a series of struggles between the various leaders, and externally a series of raids and wars against the neighbouring Muslim states, especially against Ifāt. But it is also recorded that in 1278 Sultan Dil-mārrah was defeated and deposed by his internal enemies and took refuge with the *negus* of Christian Ethiopia. This is an important piece of historical evidence proving that the consolidation of Christian Ethiopia under the rule of the first Solomonids began to exert an influence on the weakening of the sultanate of Shoa as a result of its fratricidal struggles.

The sultanate of Shoa finally lost its independence through the action of the neighbouring sultanate of Ifāt. At the end of the civil strife which had troubled Muslim Shoa from 1276 to 1280, the sultanate of Ifāt intervened directly in the weakened Shoa state, occupied the centre of Shoa and put an end to Shoa rule.

Since the commercial route through the Nile valley had been closed to Christian Ethiopia and the sea route to India had been reduced to a minimum, because of the

consolidation and extension of Muslim control, the Christian kingdom was compelled to seek its expansion southwards, towards the centre of the Ethiopian plateau. This first involved the transfer of the capital from Axum to the central region of Lasta and then, after the Solomonid dynasty had become established on the throne, its transfer to the frontier of Shoa, which was then Muslim; the monastery of St Stephen on Lake Ḥayq was recognized as a Christian religious centre, before it too was transferred to Absbo (Babra Barkān) well inside conquered Shoa. These events naturally caused Christian Ethiopia to exert strong pressure on the Muslim states of southern Ethiopia, which were thus directly threatened.

The sultanate of Ifāt

The sultanate of Ifāt, which succeeded that of Shoa in the hegemony over Islam in southern Ethiopia, was ruled by a dynasty called Walasma'. Its founders first came into Ifāt as refugees from the ancient Muslim state of Damūt and the dynasty also boasted a remote Arab origin.

The first date mentioned in the *History of the Walasma'* is that of 1376-7; but the synchronisms with the Ethiopian Chronicles and with the Arab historians make it possible to situate the foundation of the Walasma' dynasty of Ifāt at the end of the twelfth century.

Ṣabr al-dīn, the contemporary of Negus 'Amda Ṣeyon (1314-44), is also represented in the Ethiopian Chronicles, as the most important of the Muslim sovereigns of the south, being designated as 'King of the Infidels' (*Negusa 'elwan*). This confirms the position of hegemony which Ifāt held in the first half of the fourteenth century after the fall of the sultanate of Shoa. Moreover, two more useful items of historical information are furnished by the Ethiopian Chronicle on the wars of Sultan Ṣabr al-dīn. The first is that the use of *kāt* by Ethiopian Muslims is documented for the first time. *Ḳāt* (this is the Arabic word; in Amharic it is *chāt*) is a shrub (*Catha edulis*) whose leaves have a slight stimulating effect. The use of *kāt* in Ethiopia is a characteristic feature of the Muslims.

After his victory over the Muslims, the Christian sovereign wished to take advantage of his success by establishing his armed forces in the conquered territory, but he came up against the opposition of his soldiers. Having obtained victory and booty, they wanted to return home and enjoy its fruits and did not understand the need for the permanent occupation of the enemy country. This psychological fact is interesting because we shall find a similar occurrence two centuries later (in the sixteenth century), this time with the Muslim soldiers of the *Imām* Aḥmed ibn Ibrāhīm, who likewise showed their repugnance for a permanent conquest of the territory of defeated peoples.

The southwards advance of the new Solomonid dynasty and the expansion of Muslim Ifāt into Shoa were bound to lead to a struggle between the two states. The first encounter of which we have any record is in the chronicle of Negus 'Amda Ṣeyon I, when the Ethiopian sovereign states that, at the beginning of his reign, he had defeated Sultan Ḥaḳḳ al-dīn of Ifāt and slain the Muslim prince Darāder, brother of Ḥaḳḳ al-dīn. It should be pointed out here that the Arabic *History of the Walasma'* makes no mention of Ḥaḳḳ al-dīn or of this war, but, since the Muslim chronicler

attributes the beginning of the struggles of the Christians to Sultan Ḥaḳḳ al-dīn II, who reigned from 1376 to 1386 (many decades after Ḥaḳḳ al-dīn I), it may be an error on the part of the chronicler or of his source.

However, the first amply documented war between Ethiopia and Ifāt is that waged in 1332 during the reigns of Negus 'Amda Ṣeyon I and of Sultan Ṣabr al-dīn I. Ṣabr al-dīn attacked the troops of the *negus*, who had entered Shoa, but was defeated. The *negus* then appointed Djāmāl al-dīn, the brother of Ṣabr al-dīn, as sultan of Ifāt, but, because of the spurious origin of his power, he failed to assert his authority; shortly afterwards he was ousted by a vast movement of Muslim reaction stirred up by a religious agitator, the Kāḏī Ṣāleḥ. The latter managed to form a league of Muslim princes, but the *negus* once again defeated his enemies. His victory ushered in a new era among the petty Muslim states of the south, because from then onwards hegemony passed from Ifāt to the sultanate of Adal, although power remained with the Walasma' dynasty. In two centuries (the thirteenth and fourteenth), the political centre of Ethiopian Islam was shifted three times, on every occasion in a west-east direction towards the edge of the plateau: from Damūt to Shoa, from Shoa to Ifāt, and from Ifāt to Adal.

The victory won by Negus 'Amda Ṣeyon over the Muslims prompted his successors to undertake a series of military operations in the south. Thus Negus Dāwit I (1382-1411) defeated and killed Sultan Ḥaḳḳ al-dīn II in battle and his successor, Negus Yesḥaq, defeated Sultan Sa'ad al-dīn, the successor of Ḥaḳḳ al-dīn II, and pushed on towards the sea as far as Zāyla'. Sultan Sa'ad al-dīn, who fell in the battle against the Christians in 1415, became the eponymous hero of the Muslim resistance against the invading *neguses* and, from that time onwards, the Muslim south that had remained independent took the name of 'land of Sa'ad al-dīn' (*barr Sa'ad al-dīn*).

The sultanate of Adal, now at the head of Ethiopian Islam, recovered after a few decades, following which there was a strong and complex attempt to invade Shoa, which not only was Christian but was, moreover, the seat of the *neguses*. The Muslim army was led by Sultan Ṣhīhāb al-dīn Aḥmed Badlāy. After some initial successes, Badlāy was defeated by Negus Zare'a Yā'qob in a great battle at Egubbā on 29 December 1445, and the sultan fell in the fighting. The *negus* pursued the Muslim army as far as the River Hawāsh and acquired booty which appeared quite magnificent to the Christian Ethiopians. This was because the commercial relations which the sultanate of Adal maintained with the outside world enabled the Muslims to obtain luxury articles which the Christian Ethiopians, whose relations with foreign countries were still limited, were not yet able to procure.

After the battle of Egubbā, the sultans of Adal, where the dynasty of the Walasma', the former sultans of Ifāt, had continued to rule, established their capital at Dakar at the edge of the eastern lowland plain. A few years later, Negus Eskender took the offensive, entered Adal, and conquered and destroyed this capital. However, on its way back to its territory in Shoa, the Christian army was surprised in 1475 by the sultan of Adal, Ṣhams al-dīn ibn Muḥammad, and Negus Eskender was defeated and died in the battle. But the Muslims did not follow up this victory, because Adal was thwarted and impoverished by the struggles of the various emirs for supremacy.

The capital was then transferred eastward again, to Aussa down in the lowlands,

until Sultan Abū Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn Azḥar al-dīn finally transferred the capital from Adal to Harar in 1520. He thus founded the dynasty of the emirs of Harar, who for three centuries held power in the Muslim state which from that time onwards was called the emirate of Harar. The reason for this was that Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr ibn Azḥar al-dīn, who had shifted the capital to the south for reasons of safety, held supreme power in name only, since he had maintained on the throne the princes of the Walasma' dynasty, for whom he reserved the title of sultan. By doing this he avoided the charge of illegitimacy and secured the nominal power of the old dynasty for his own purposes. His successors did the same, until the Walasma' dynasty became extinct in obscure circumstances.

The new sultanate of Harar was also soon torn by civil strife; and this lasted until a strong personality arose in the future *Imām* Aḥmed ibn Ibrāhīm, who gained the ascendancy and concentrated all power in his hands.

21

The East African coast and the Comoro Islands

Introduction

This chapter attempts to re-evaluate the history of the East African coast and the Comores between the seventh and eleventh centuries. This is being done with a view to correcting the false picture painted by historians and/or archaeologists of the colonial school of thought, who presented rather a history of foreign traders and colonizers credited with the civilization of the coast. The role of outsiders in the early history of the East African coast cannot be denied, but it is one thing to be part of a process of change and completely another to claim responsibility for the process. Recent research, however, is slowly but surely making it very clear that the history of the East African coast is the history of indigenous African populations and their interaction with the environment.

The sources

Archaeology

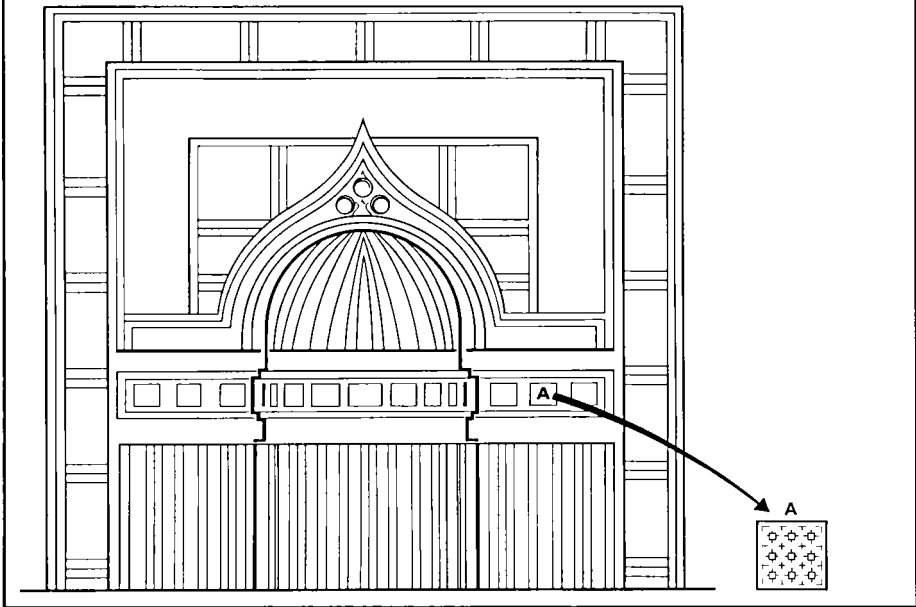
Although archaeological work in this region is still in its infancy, already a great deal of evidence has come to light to testify to the long existence of human settlements in many of its parts. Especially abundant is the evidence for early and later Iron Age settlements. First and foremost is the site of Kwale, excavated in the mid-1960s, where a wide variety of pottery, iron slag, implements, etc., attesting to the existence here of an Iron Age population by the first quarter of the first millennium of the Christian era, were retrieved. Related contemporary cultural material has also been reported from excavated as well as surface sites in a number of areas in central and coastal Tanzania and Kenya. Such areas include the Usambara Mountains, the South Pare Hills, and the Mijikenda *Kaya* settlements, to name but a few.

At Gedi, for instance, a special kind of twelfth-century ornamented ware has been excavated from a stratum below the city foundations. The ornamentation and style are indisputably African, but the sherds have been ascribed to Oromo rather than Bantu or Swahili, on the basis of negative evidence. Both at Unguja Ukuu and Manda, sites dating to the ninth century have been found. However, it is reported by Chittick that blue-glazed Islamic ware is by far the commonest import but unfortunately no statistics



21.1 Excavations on the Manda site.

21.2 Old Sh̄rāzī mosque of Domoni Anjouan, Comoro Islands (eleventh century).
(H. T. Wright, P. V́erin)



are given to enable comparison with local ware.

In Kilwa, the ninth–twelfth-century period predating the *Shīrāzī* dynasty is marked by homogeneous cultural material, including slag as evidence of iron-smelting, evidence of the manufacturing of beads, pottery and fish debris. Although Chittick is of the opinion that the settlement of Kilwa was not autochthonous, the chronicles leave no doubt that Kilwa's population at this time was local. Similar red-finished ware occurs at other coastal sites, such as Unguja Ukuu and Manda. The fact that no such pottery has been reported from the hinterland does not mean that this innovative technique could not have developed independently in the coastal towns.

The two local wares of this period are (1) bag-shaped cooking pots with incised decoration on the rim or shoulder, and (2) red burnished ware. Imported wares were sgraffito and white tin-glazed Persian sherds. Other archaeological finds from this period include knives, arrowheads, fish-hooks, hollow tubes, iron points and nails and carnelian beads. As is the case at Manda, glass beads do not occur before the tenth century.

At Unguja Ukuu on Zanzibar Island, the earliest local pottery is identified as being around the tenth century or the equivalent to the Manda period. Although Gedi is said to have been founded in the twelfth century and is therefore outside the chronological confines of this volume, it is of interest to note that the quantity of sherds of local earthenware greatly exceeded imported sherds. The local ware was unglazed and sparingly incised, indented, applied or rarely colour-ornamented. The African element, i.e. the ribbed ornamented ware and the hemispherical bowls from the earliest levels, is undisputed; this type resembles pottery from the Central Africa sites of Zimbabwe and Mapungubwe.

Finger-nail ornamented cooking pots, which are still made today by the Giriama, were found at Gedi. This particular ornamentation is now regarded as characteristic of the Wanyika, as opposed to the incised decoration practised by the Swahili.

Archaeological evidence throughout the East Coast leaves no doubt that, in all cases, there were local inhabitants with their own civilization before the coming of the Arabs. After their arrival, the local earthenware technique was supplanted by the foreign technique. Consequently, imported wares, including blue and green glazed earthenware (Islamic), 'yellow and black' glazed earthenware, and blue and white celadon (China), became more abundant than local earthenware after the foundation of the city of Gedi.

Written sources

The above archaeological evidence for the indigenous origins of the settlements in this region during the period is further corroborated by written sources. The majority of these were produced by Arab authors, but there are also some fragmentary accounts in Chinese. It was precisely the preponderance of Arabic written materials that constituted one of the chief reasons why the East Coast has been for such a long time considered to be an Arabo-Persian colony, or a cultural appendix of the larger Islamic world, in which the local people played only an insignificant role. However, a careful reading of the most important Arabic works and their unbiased interpretation will

show a quite different picture from that painted by the former school of historiography.

The Arabs called the inhabitants of Eastern Africa, south of the Juba river, *al-Zandj* (or *al-Zindj*), a term whose etymology continues to be obscure. Some *Zandj* words quoted by Arab authors point quite distinctly to their Bantu origin; the name of God – *makludjulu* – renders the Bantu *mkulu* (great person), the reduplication – *mkulunkulu* – indicating a very great personage. The nearest to this ancient form is the Zulu *unkulunkulu*. Other words preserved are *wafsimi*, Kiswahili *wafalme* (sing. *mfalme*) – kings or chiefs; *inbila*, from the Bantu *mpela* – rhinoceros; and *makwandju*, Kiswahili *mkwanju* – the tamarind tree (*Tamarindus indica*).

Nowhere in Arabic sources from this period do we find any mention of large settlements or colonies of expatriates from Muslim countries. The coast is described as inhabited and, what is more important, ruled by the local *Zandj* population. Al-Mas'ūdī, who visited the coast in 916, stresses the non-Muslim character of the *Zandj* state, and the famous tale of Buzurg ibn Shāhriyār about the kidnapping of the *Zandj* king by Arab slavers offers further evidence of the independent development of the coastal Bantu peoples. Even from the comparatively late al-Idrīsī (d. 1165), we gain the impression that political power in all the coastal settlements was in the hands of local Africans.

On the other hand, all Arabic sources speak of constantly expanding trade between the East African coast and lands surrounding the Indian Ocean, and of regular visits of Arab, Persian and Indian merchants. This intercourse was nothing new since, in the preceding period, the Graeco-Roman authors had already described the commercial links between this region and other parts of the Indian Ocean area.¹

As for the permanent presence of Arabo-Persian elements in large numbers in the coastal settlements and their alleged founding of them, there is for this period only one indication, and even this one is highly ambiguous. Al-Mas'ūdī tells us that the island of *Ḳanbalū* (Pemba) is inhabited by a Muslim people, although their language is the *Zandj* one, adding that the Muslims conquered the island and made the local people prisoners. Nowhere does the author maintain that these Muslims were Arabs or Persians; their *Zandj* language points rather to a group of Islamized Bantu-speakers. In any case, the island was inhabited by the *Zandj* prior to the Muslim conquest.

Oral traditions

The third main source is the oral tradition preserved in the local chronicles of Pate, Lamu, Kilwa and other cities; the majority of these chronicles were written down either in Kiswahili or in Arabic only as late as the nineteenth century. An earlier version of the *Kilwa Chronicle* is contained in the sixteenth-century João de Barros' *Decadas da Asia*, being thus much closer in time to the earlier period. In many of these traditions, an attempt is made to forge links between the ruling dynasty or class with some of the famous persons and/or cities of Middle Eastern history. This is a common trend in the traditions of nearly all Islamized African societies.²

1. See Chapter 16 of Volume II.

2. See Chapter 4 of this volume.

Although most oral tradition would have low reliability, owing to the antiquity of the period covered here, it is nevertheless a source for Mombasa's three clans (*Taifa tatu*) – Wa-Changamwe, Wa-Kilindini and Wa-Tangana – whose tradition claims that they were the original inhabitants until their sovereignty was overthrown by the *Shīrāzī* rulers in the second half of the thirteenth century.

Most historians have used these sources only to produce histories of diffusion and migrations of peoples and ideas to the African coast, the resultant synthesis being that the history and civilization of the coast is alien. It is thus necessary to review the history through a new approach which will identify the local components in the genesis of the East Coast civilization and show that it is basically autochthonous and adapted to the region. This does not deny occasional foreign inputs, for we are not dealing with a closed culture.

The coastal peoples

The Arab geographers divided the eastern coast into three parts: the land of the Barbar (*Bilād al-Barbar*) in the north; the land of the Zandj (*Bilād al-Zandj*) between the Webi Shebele river and some point on the coast opposite to Zanzibar; and the Sofala country (*Arḍ* or *Bilād Sufāla*) to the south. Whether the mysterious country of Wāk-Wāk is to be placed even farther southwards on the African continent, or whether it meant Madagascar, is difficult to decide, owing to the confused accounts.

There is little doubt that the name Barbar was applied by the Arabs to the Somali and other Cushitic-speaking peoples of the Horn of Africa. In the same sense, this term was already employed by the *Periplus* and by Claudius Ptolemy and Cosmas. There is sufficient evidence to show that the Bantu population lived as far north as the Webi Shebele. Bantu-speaking groups like the Shidla, Shabeli, Dube and Elay still exist along the lower Webi Shebele, and the group known as the Goshā lives to the north of the Juba. On the other hand, it seems that Somali elements penetrated as early as the tenth or eleventh century into the coastal region between Mogadishu and Brava; in the mid-twelfth century, al-Idrīsī had already located 50 villages of the Hawiya – a Somali group – along the banks of an unnamed river, probably the Webi Shebele.

The land of the Zandj seems to have attracted more attention than all the other parts of the coast. This was chiefly due to the brisk trade of the Zandj with the countries around the Indian Ocean. The descriptions furnished by Arab authors leave no doubt that the coastal people were of Negro stock. The authors before the twelfth century did not know any coastal place by its name, only settlements on the offshore islands. Apart from Kanbalū (most probably Pemba Island) visited by al-Mas'ūdī, only one other name is mentioned by an early author: al-Djāhīz (died 869) divided the Zandj into two branches, the *Kanbalū* and the *Lundjūya*, which is clearly a corruption of the Bantu for Zanzibar–Ungudja. The same author also relates a highly interesting account, found nowhere else, about a sea expedition led by a prince of Oman which reached – probably at the end of the seventh century – the land of the Zandj and was destroyed there by the local peoples.

To the south of the land of the Zandj began the Sofala country, called by the Arabs *Sufāla al-Zandj* (Sufala of the Zandj) to distinguish it from the Indian Sofala, near

Bombay. Since the African Sofala was famous for its gold, it was also known as *Sufāla al-dhahab* (Golden Sofala) or *Sufāla al-tibr* (Sofala of gold sand). This country designated the whole stretch of the coast between Pangani and southern Mozambique. The Sofala peoples were akin to the Zandj and engaged in trading relations with traders coming from Arab countries and India. It represented the terminal of voyages, since no ship ventured to sail further owing to the dangers represented by the uncharted seas. Al-Bīrūnī's (d. 1050) remark that, beyond Sofala, the Indian Sea joined the Western (Atlantic) Ocean is highly interesting.

By the ninth century, most of the East African coastal towns were inhabited by the Swahili. The degree of affluence differed from one town to another, depending on their social organization and economic activities. Very few would have been of stone architecture in the initial stages, but, as the settlements prospered, more and more stone architecture would result. Kilwa and Mafia, as shown by the archaeological excavations, were characterized by mud-and-wattle houses, a fishing economy, local pottery and iron products, and limited local trade.

Social organization

The coastal settlements were always self-governing and generally independent, their links with each other following various patterns of alliance and hostility. From time to time, Kilwa, Pate and Mombasa attained a precarious hegemony when they were powerful enough to exact tribute from others.

In the Benadir states along the Somali coast, the authority seems to have originally been a council of lineage heads, as in Mogadishu, Brava and Siyu, one of them being recognized as *primus inter pares*. But most coastal towns acquired chiefs, who were often immigrant Arabs or Persians accepted voluntarily as in Pate, presumably because they were outside the sphere of clan rivalries.

The mixture of indigenous people and immigrants resulted in an ethnically mixed and economically specialized society. This led to the characteristic pattern of socio-economic differentiation and social stratification, with individual groups living together in their own ward and quarter (*mtaa*) of the town and different groups of wards ranked hierarchically one against another.

The Kiswahili language

The coastal settlements or small towns brought together different peoples, the majority of whom were of Bantu stock, a condition which must have favoured the development of Kiswahili.

The term Swahili is derived from Arabic *sāhil* (pl. *sawāhil*) – coast – and was employed first for the region stretching from Mogadishu to Lamu. The Kiswahili language (literally 'the language of the coast') developed, of course, only later, with the introduction of many Arab and Persian loan-words which went with the progressive Islamization of the coastal people. It would therefore be more proper to speak, at least before the thirteenth century, of proto-Kiswahili as the Bantu language forming the base on which later Kiswahili developed. It seems that Kiswahili was

first concentrated in the area north of the Tana delta along the Somali coast and spread from there southwards. This corresponds to the pattern of settlement since, until 1300, there were about twenty settlements to the north of the Tana; to the south were Mombasa, Malindi, Zanzibar, Pemba, Kilwa and a few others. These towns nurtured the development of Kiswahili, while subsequent migrations from the core area spread the language.

Linguistic studies have left no doubt that Kiswahili is a Bantu language closely related to the Pokomo and Mijikenda languages previously spoken along the Somali and northern Kenya coast. Kiswahili seems to have developed in this area, as the people speaking the languages ancestral to Mijikenda, Pokomo and Kiswahili became divided and their languages diverged into separate dialects and eventually separate languages.

As commerce became more important and the interaction with Muslim traders increased, a number of Arabic and Persian words and the Arabic script were adopted into Kiswahili. Around the ninth century, the language spread down the coast, being carried by traders from Somaliland and northern Kenya, who established new settlements and interacted with the societies in which they settled and gradually facilitated the adoption of Islam as the religion of the ruling and merchant classes.

This view is contrary to the thesis propounded by some historians, who argued that the Swahili culture has very strong Arab elements, that the language uses Arabic script and that the stone buildings and mosques are constructed in the Arabic manner. This perspective was essentially diffusionist, since it assumed that cultural innovation and historical development in East Africa could only come from outside. Recent studies of Swahili culture and society reveal that the African components are far more prominent than is allowed for by the diffusionists' arguments:

- (1) Kiswahili grammatical structure, as well as the greater part of the vocabulary, are closely related to the Mijikenda and Pokomo languages, while its literature reflects the African oral code.
- (2) The material culture of the Swahili has no analogues in Arabia or Persia. The Swahili stone architecture has no detailed parallels to enable it to be concluded that its origins lie in the Near East. Instead it developed locally out of the mud-and-wattle architecture prevalent along the coast, as a result of increasing economic wealth and socio-economic differentiation.
- (3) Even the Islam of the coast bears strong traces of traditional African religions in the prominence of beliefs in spirits and spirit possession, ancestor worship, witchcraft and divination, all of which coexist of course, with the more orthodox legal tradition.

Although Islam had reached the northern part of the East African coast by the eighth century and the southern part well before the eleventh, it was not until the 1400s that a distinctive Islamic coast civilization differentiated itself, to become what can be called *Shīrāzī*. For a long time, Islam was professed only by immigrants from Arabia and Persia who were settled in the coastal towns. Although these expatriates had not developed any large-scale proselytizing activity, some people in their immediate entourage, as well as those Africans who were interested in commercial intercourse

with foreigners, accepted Islam as their religion.³ It is also generally accepted that Islam was first implanted on the islands before it spread to the mainland.

This spreading movement is closely connected with the problem of the *Shīrāzī*. The oral tradition and the chronicles of late origin written in Kiswahili maintain that some merchants from the Persian Gulf, especially from *Sīrāf*, the port for the famous city of *Shīrāz*, came to East Africa during the ninth and tenth centuries. Other accounts from Kilwa indicate a probable colonization of the northern portion of the coast (the Benadir coast) by the *Karmatians*, an extreme *Shī'ite* sect,⁴ whose centre of power was located in *al-Aḥsā* region of Arabia, bordering the Persian Gulf. The tradition claims connection between the *Karmatian* state of *al-Aḥsā* and the founding of the states of *Mogadishu*, *Brava* and *Marka*, and possibly also the *Lamu* archipelago and *Zanzibar*. It also claims that *Kilwa* was founded at the same period (the tenth century) as the *Benadir* towns, but these towns are at least two hundred years earlier than the towns of *Kilwa* and *Sofala* and those on the *Comoro Islands*.

The *Shīrāzī* have been credited with the introduction of a highly developed stone architecture, the use of lime and cement, carpentry, cotton-weaving and other sciences, including the Persian solar calendar, and a wide variety of fruits. However, it is now contended that the *Shīrāzī* as such did not introduce all these, but that their development was accelerated by the prosperity brought by trade. Undeniably, some fruit-trees must have been introduced by the *Arabo-Persians*, but the art of stone masonry and carpentry was known along the coast before the coming of the *Shīrāzī*.

Oral tradition relating to the Persian influence on the *Benadir* coast is supported by some inscriptions from the thirteenth century containing Persian names; on the other hand, there is little evidence of direct Persian activity to the south of the *Somali* coast. Nevertheless, there are indications that, from 1100 of the Christian era onwards, groups of merchants, most of whom were descendants of intermarriage between *Arabo-Persians* and the local population on the *Benadir* coast, started to migrate south and carried the *Arabo-Islamic* culture to the islands of *Zanzibar*, *Pemba*, *Kilwa* and *Mafia*. These, together with the *Ozi*, *Malindi* and *Mombasa* town states, remained *Shīrāzī*, although increasingly *Bantuized*, until after the *Portuguese* conquest.

Economic activities

In economic terms, the coastal society was an urban-rural continuum with many people earning their living from agriculture. No doubt there were also pastoralists, especially in the north on the *Benadir* coast. But the majority of the *Swahili*, particularly those living in the smaller and medium settlements, were primarily agriculturalists. In *Arabic* sources we find fragmentary accounts about crops and cultures. The chief crops seem to have been sorghum millet (*dhurra*), as well as yams whose local name *al-kilārī* is attested by *al-Mas'ūdī*; another edible plant cultivated by the *Zandj* was *al-rāsan*, which has been identified as *Coleus*. The diet of the coastal people was

3. See Chapter 3 of this volume.

4. See Chapter 7 of this volume

supplemented by bananas, coconuts, rice and tamarind and, in some places, even by grapes; sugar-cane as a plant is also mentioned.

Archaeological investigations in Kilwa have shown that the only grain to have been grown was sorghum, as evidenced by carbonized seeds. No implements for grinding grain have been found from earlier times, but in the later period rotary querns were also used then as now, but such tools would have vanished from the archaeological record.

The coastal communities obviously also engaged in a fair amount of maritime activities – fishing, boat-building and sailing. Many Arab authors insist on the Zandj being fish-eaters and add that for this purpose they sharpened their teeth. All along the coast the people were active in fishing but some places are mentioned where this kind of activity was the main occupation, as for example in Malindi, where the inhabitants exported their catch. On some islands, the people gathered shells for making ornaments but not for food. In Sofala, they dived for pearls.

Although boat-building and navigation are inseparable from fishing, Arab authors are silent about this aspect of the Swahili way of life. Only Buzurg ibn *Shahriyār* mentions numerous boats (*zawānīk*) that surrounded Arab ships near the Sofala coast. The same author wrote that among the ship captains on the Indian Ocean were some Zandj; this indicates that the eastern Bantu were acquainted not only with coastal navigation but with that on the high seas as well. The use in the first century of the boat known as *dau la mtepe* on the Benadir coast and what is now the Tanzanian coast is clearly referred to in the *Periplus*. The sewn boat, *mtepe*, and the smaller variant, *dau la mtepe*, have therefore been plying the coast for a long time, although they are now extinct except for a few specimens in museums. Their origin is debatable: linguistically, it would appear as if the *mtepe* was indigenous to East Africa, but its structural details would suggest an Indian prototype, the *mtepe* being a Perso-Arabization of this prototype.

While there can be no doubt about the existence, since ancient times, of animal husbandry to the north of the Juba river, the situation obtaining to the south is unclear. On one hand, al-Mas'ūdī reports cattle being used by the Zandj for warlike purposes, such as oxen with saddles and reins, while Buzurg mentions sheep and other domestic animals. Al-Idrīsī, on the other hand, categorically insists on the lack of any beasts of burden or cattle among the people on the eastern coast and other Arab authors too are totally silent about animal husbandry. As is well known, the coastal parts of East Africa are now infested by the tsetse fly and thus quite unsuited to cattle-keeping; but it is not altogether impossible that some stretches were tsetse-free in earlier times, thus enabling animal husbandry to be pursued.

Although hunting must have formed a part of the basic economy, there is only rather scanty direct evidence for it. Arab authors were chiefly fascinated by elephant-hunting, while other hunted animals included leopards, lions and monkeys. Most of the game was hunted for export purposes (ivory, skins) and, although we do not find any mention of hunting for food, it seems natural that the meat of killed animals (elephants) was consumed.

Among the mineral resources, it was gold that naturally attracted the main attention of the Arab authors and Sofala was considered as being one of the most famous gold-rich

lands of the known world. Although al-Idrīsī wrote about the coastal towns of *Djāṣṭa* and *Daghūṭa* (which have not yet been identified but were presumably somewhere on the Mozambique coast) as being the places where gold was found, it is evident from all other written sources that the main gold-mines were located in the interior of the Sofala country and that the coastal settlements served only as export ports. Al-Bīrūnī reports that gold in Sofala was found in the form of grains; the same kind has been discovered in the Zimbabwe archaeological complex.

The main evidence for iron-mining is provided by al-Idrīsī, who pointed out that the chief centres of iron production were Malindi and Mombasa in the north and *Djanṭāma* and *Dandāma* in the south. Iron became one of the major export commodities of these places and formed the main source of revenue. Although there is no reason to doubt al-Idrīsī's veracity, his account poses some problems, since no large smelting-furnaces have yet been found in the vicinity of Mombasa and Malindi. Further archaeological research is needed to elucidate this important problem.

Commercial activities

The East Coast is one of the few regions in sub-Saharan Africa to have entered at a very early stage into continuous trade relations with the outside world. The establishment of a steadily expanding market in the Islamic countries offered new possibilities for the export trade of the coastal settlements. Not only did the volume of trade increase, but traditional commodities were supplemented by new ones, thereby contributing to the diversification and specialization of various coastal towns. During the ninth and tenth centuries, many coastal trading centres, such as Mogadishu, Marka, Brava, Mombasa, Manda and Unguja Ukuu, were founded and expanded. Before the eleventh century, however, the only prominent towns seem to have been Manda in the Lamu archipelago and *Ḳanbalū* (Pemba). The others apparently attained prominence only at a later date.

The items of trade that attracted foreigners to the coastal towns were many and varied, but the most important were ivory, tortoiseshell, ambergris, incense, spices, gold, iron, animal skins and slaves.

Some of these products reached China at a rather early date: ambergris, sweet oil of storax, tortoiseshell, dragon's blood (resins of *Dracanea schizantha* and *D. cinnabari*) and aloe (plant juice). Chinese records also mention that the black inhabitants from Kumr Zangi (Zanzibar) were enticed by food and then captured. The Arabs from Oman also enticed children by offering them dates and then abducted them into slavery. The well-known story told by Buzurg ibn *Shahriyār* about the kidnapping of the king of the *Zandj* offers an insight into another manner of obtaining slaves.

We come thus to the problem of the slave-trade. There is – for the period between the seventh and the twelfth century – practically no direct evidence in the written sources about slave-trading along the East African coast. The above-mentioned incidents show that slaves were procured by capturing or abducting local people rather than by purchasing them. This method was hardly effective in the long run and could be employed only occasionally and was thus likely to produce a restricted number of slaves. Its prolonged use aroused the hostility of the coastal people and had an adverse

effect on the development of normal commercial relations.

On the other hand, the mass employment of the so-called *Zandj* slaves in irrigation works in lower Iraq, which, in the ninth century, led to the famous slave revolt, seems to indicate that there must have been a continuous flow of enslaved people from East Africa to the Islamic countries.⁵

A solution to this apparent contradiction is offered by the possibility that, although the black slaves in southern Iraq were of a different origin, say from Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa and other parts of Africa, albeit with a certain proportion of East Africans, they were for some reason collectively known as the '*Zandj*'. This does not mean that there was no slave-trading at all on the East African coast; there certainly was such trading, but its volume cannot have been very great, for it would otherwise not have escaped the notice of Arab authors, who brought very detailed accounts of all export and import items; slaves do not figure among these.

The export of gold from the southern parts began in the tenth century, whereas in the twelfth century al-Idrīsī considered iron as the main commodity exported by many coastal towns. The Benadir coast was famous for its exports of incense, perfumes and aromatic oils, such as balsam and myrrh.

As for imports, the main items recorded by Arab and Chinese sources were ceramics (Islamic and Chinese), cloth, beads and glass. By 1100, southern Asian immigrants who had arrived in northern Madagascar and the Comoros some centuries earlier were exporting soapstone vessels to Kilwa, Manda and further afield.

The earliest item among the imported pottery was the Islamic *sgraffito*, a ware with mottled glaze applied over a slight slip. The largest imports, especially in the case of Gedi, were blue- and green-glazed earthenware, a yellow and black celadon and blue and white porcelain from China. In the eleventh century, Chinese exports consisted largely of gold, silver, copper, silk and porcelain. Chinese coins have been found all over the coast and continued to reach East Africa until the thirteenth century.

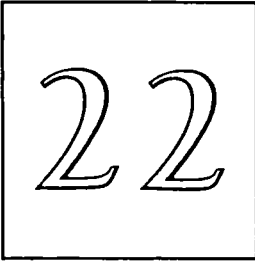
The question of early contacts between the coastal settlements and the interior still remains a crucial problem. It is inconceivable that there should have been no intercourse at all, but no evidence – in this case only archaeological investigation is needed to find it – of any importance has yet been produced. The only region where there was significant trade with the interior seems to be the Sofala coast; gold that was exported from this country came mainly from what is now Zimbabwe. However, it would be premature to conclude that the coastal people ventured, at this early period, far into the interior.

There was probably no long-distance trade in the usual sense of the term; what we can imagine at most is that goods which came from a long distance were bartered from one people to another, rather than being carried by caravans, as in the nineteenth century. These contacts left no durable traces; the local pottery of the coast is unrelated to that of the interior.

5. See Chapter 26 of this volume.

Conclusion

During the period under discussion, the East Coast witnessed the beginnings of various historical processes that came to full fruition only after the twelfth century. It was probably during this time that the foundations of an African culture were laid, upon which the rich Swahili culture was later built. The political and social development of the coastal Bantu-speaking peoples started to be influenced by the rise of international trade on the Indian Ocean. At first, the impact was felt mostly in the economic field as some of the coastal settlements geared themselves more to foreign trade; gradually, politics, culture and religion were permeated by the norms brought by immigrants from Islamic countries. The first region to come under external influences was situated to the north of the Juba river; from there, in later centuries, new waves of migrants carried the elements of the mixed culture to the south. At the same time, all immigrants, who were never very numerous, underwent a process of Bantuization. The most outstanding outcome of this process of interchange and intermarriage has been the Kiswahili language and culture, in which features of African and Oriental origin have been welded together.



The East African interior

Population movements

The seventh to the eleventh centuries appear on the whole to have been a period of consolidation of previously established trends in the East African interior. That is not at all to say that this period was without change; new ethnic expansions took place, altering the linguistic map and creating new challenges to be dealt with by established communities.

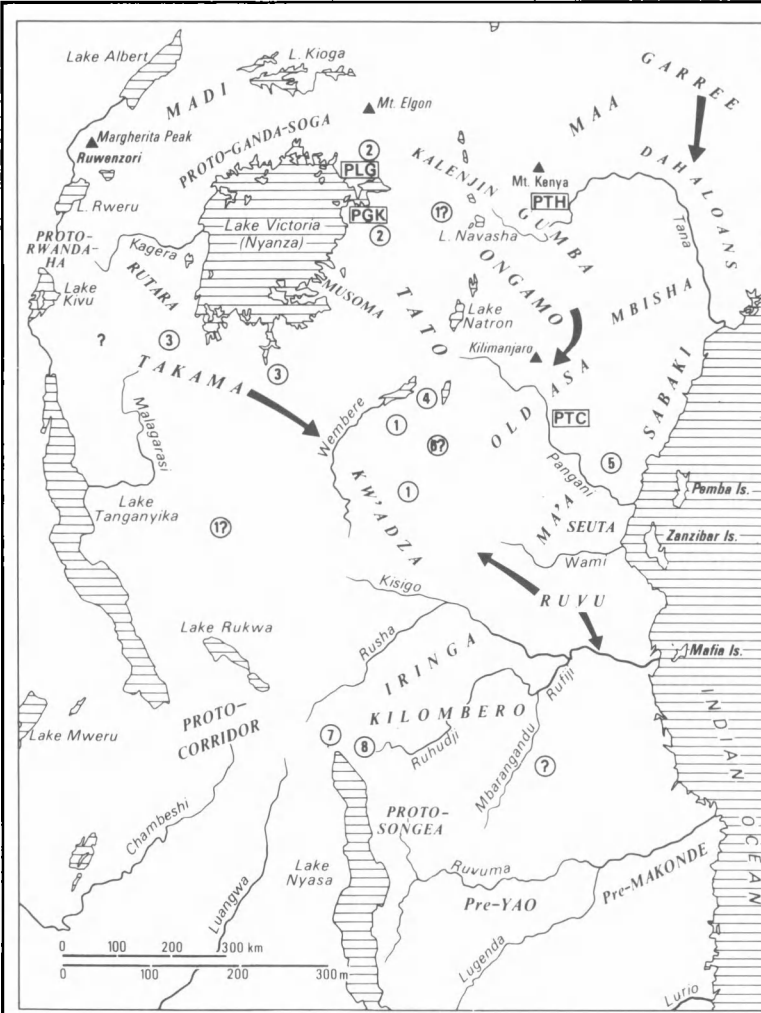
The two most widely encountered groupings of peoples at the beginning of the seventh century were the Southern Cushites and the Bantu. Central Sudanic, Nilotic and Khoisan-speaking peoples were significant, though less numerous, actors in the events of the mid-first millennium.

The first Southern Cushites, who had settled in northern Kenya during the third millennium before our era, can be identified as the makers of the so-called savanna pastoral neolithic tradition of East Africa. From the beginning of their settlement, the Southern Cushites kept cattle and small livestock as well as donkeys, but they were also grain cultivators, using both irrigation and animal manure to increase their yields.

The Southern Cushites of the early first millennium of our era were a varied lot. Along the Tana river and in parts of the near interior of the Kenya coast lived the Dahaloans, partly cultivators, partly hunters and gatherers. Another group, remembered in oral tradition by the name Mbisha, lived in the Taita Hills. Around Mount Kilimanjaro and southward on to the Maasai steppe can be placed the Old Asa-speaking communities, while in parts of central Tanzania lived the closely related Old Kw'adza and Iringa. Many of the Rift Southern Cushites of the seventh century may have been pre-eminently pastoral in economy. Others, especially around Kilimanjaro, the Taita Hills, and the edges of the Rift Valley, gave primary attention to their crops.

The other significant Southern Cushitic communities of the era spoke Mbuguan languages. One group, the Kirinyaga Cushites, apparently preceded the Bantu settlers of Mount Kenya, whereas the second Mbuguan group, the Old Ma'a, were apparently centred by this time in north-eastern Tanzania, where the ecological conditions allowed extensive cattle-raising.

The Southern Cushitic expansions of the last three millennia before our era had wholly incorporated many Khoisan communities. Other such societies had continued



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|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|--------------------------|
| IRINGA | Ethnic groups | 5 | Pre-Asu |
| ➔ | Probable directions of ethnic expansions during or following the period of the seventh to ninth centuries | 6 | Pre-Rango |
| 1 | Khoisan hunter-gatherers | 7 | Pre-Nyakyusa |
| 2 | Plateau Southern Cushites | 8 | Proto-Njombe |
| 3 | Nyanza Southern Cushites | PGK | Proto-Gusii-Kuria (Mara) |
| 4 | Proto-West Rift Southern Cushites | PLG | Proto-Luyia-Gusii |
| | | PTC | Proto-Taita-Chaga |
| | | PTH | Pre-Thagicu |

Note Despite the close similarity in self-names, the Ma'a are a Southern Cushitic people quite distinct from the Maa, who spoke an Eastern Nilotic language

22.1 Major eastern African societies from about the seventh to the ninth century. (C. Ehret)

to coexist as hunter-gatherers living alongside food-producing Cushites, but had taken up the language of those dominant neighbours. However, around the fringes of the Southern Cushitic areas of central Tanzania, at least two Khoisan groups have been able to maintain their languages down to the present. The Hadza survived as a unit by Lake Eyasi, in lands marginal to farming and inimical to cattle on account of the tsetse fly. But even they had probably been significantly influenced in material culture by nearby West Rift people by the seventh century of our era. The other community, the Sandawe, survived by adopting agriculture and so gaining the economic basis for successfully competing with other food-producers. The beginning of the Sandawe shift to food production could have been as early as the period of the seventh to eleventh centuries.

The initial challenge to Southern Cushitic predominance came from the Southern Nilotes, who began to move southward out of the Uganda-Sudan border regions sometime around the middle of the first millennium before the Christian era and are to be identified as the makers of the Elmenteita archaeological tradition. By the seventh century, two distinct descendant societies of the early Southern Nilotes had emerged, the pre-Kalenjin, north of the Mau, and the Tato, from whom the modern Dadoga derive, to the south of that range.

But the more serious challenge was posed by the Bantu expansion into East Africa. Some of the new immigrants went to the coastal areas of southern Kenya and to parts of the mountainous areas of north-eastern Tanzania, in particular to the Pare and Ngulu ranges. These were the makers of Kwale pottery.

A second early movement of Bantu into coastal East Africa was that of the north-east coastal people, probably by or before the middle of the first millennium of the Christian era. By the seventh century north-east coastal communities probably stretched from north of the mouth of the Tana river to the hinterland of modern Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

Several Bantu settlements ended up in far southern East Africa. The Kilombero people had settled in or around the valley of that name, while others settled farther south, in the Songea highlands and south of the Ruvuma. Still other settlements took place at the northern end of Lake Nyasa.

The final notable early Bantu settlements in East Africa were along the western shore of Lake Victoria. The Wami Gulf settlement, by makers of Urewe ware, was the probable base out of which the later Luyia-Gisu societies arose. The second settlement, by makers of Lelesu pottery, may have been ephemeral.

Hence, by the seventh century, Bantu farming communities could be found in a scattered and very uneven distribution. The common factor in this distribution is the usual correlation of Bantu settlement with areas of more than 900-1,000 millimetres of rain a year. Early Bantu settlement seems to have gone to areas most like those from which they came: wooded or forested lands with sufficient rainfall for yam-based planting agriculture. What made the wetter areas doubly attractive is that they must frequently have been areas little or not at all utilized by the established Southern Cushitic and Nilotic food-producers. Along the East African coast many areas would have been tsetse-infested and thus unattractive to the cattle-herding Cushites and Nilotes. In southern Tanzania, Bantu settlement often went into areas similarly

unsuited to livestock-raising and, in any case, not yet reached by Southern Cushitic expansion. In many of these areas, hunter-gatherer bands must have operated but, as food-collectors, they were at a distinct disadvantage in the competition for resources with incoming food-producers. Except in the colder highland forests, hunter-gatherers were probably assimilated into the intrusive Bantu communities before very many centuries had passed.

The one notable exception to the pattern of Bantu settlement was the movement of the Lelesu-ware makers into quite dry parts of central Tanzania. If this community survived as a separate society into later eras, it would have had to have made rapid and major subsistence adaptations, shifting wholly to grain cultivation. The evidence for connecting the Lelesu people to any later Bantu-speaking society is as yet lacking, and hence this intriguing possible history cannot at present be followed up.

The vast lowland running from the Tana river to the Shebelle basin in Somalia was already for several centuries the home of the early Somali and Rendille peoples. Their expansion into these regions proceeded at the expense not only of fairly numerous hunter-gatherers of uncertain language affiliations, but of Dahaloan herding communities. But, by the seventh century, the regions of the Juba and Shebelle rivers had become largely Somali-speaking. Containing the driest areas of East Africa, the north-eastern regions had become by the seventh century the centre of emergence of a new form of pastoralism, in which camels replaced cattle as the chief subsistence animals. Along with it went a new social development – the nomadic pattern of life – unknown in the more southerly parts of East Africa. This shift was rather far advanced among the pre-Rendille, who lived in the driest areas, and among some of the Somali-speakers. Others lived in somewhat better-watered areas, where cattle could have held their own with camels; for the sedentary agricultural societies along the Juba and Shebelle, cattle were much more useful animals.

Ethnic processes

The persistence in the seventh to eleventh centuries of trends already established in the first six centuries of our era can be depicted from a variety of standpoints.

From the geographical point of view, the various Bantu-speaking societies remained mostly within the relatively restricted ecological bounds of their early settlement areas, although they must have continued to extend their effective use of the potentialities of those spheres, probably clearing more forest and spreading to the limits of the suitable environments outside the highlands. The linguistic evidence also indicates growth by a continuing process of assimilation of non-Bantu-speaking groups in a number of areas.

Differences and distinctions among Bantu societies also continued to grow. All the Bantu of East Africa at the beginning of our era spoke dialects of a single Eastern Bantu language. By the eleventh century, the process of differentiation had proceeded far enough for quite a large number of separate languages to be distinguished: the north-east coastal language, itself consisting of three distinct dialect groups (Seuta, Sabaki and Ruvu); the Takama language of Bantu living somewhere south of Lake Victoria; the proto-Gusii-Kuria language along the south-east side of the lake; proto-Luyia-Gisu of the north-east shores; proto-Thagicu, probably the language of the makers of

Gatung'ang'a ware on Mount Kenya; proto-Taita-Chaga, spoken by the fashioners of Maore ware in north Pare, Kilimanjaro and Taita; and the several languages of far southern Tanzania. The first split of the Taita-Chaga group involved the movement of a small set of people into the Taita Hills at some point late in the millennium; their dialect of Taita-Chaga developed into the present Saghala language. A subsequent period of movement from north Pare to Taita brought a second Taita-Chaga dialect, the source of modern Dawida, into the region. The remaining Taita-Chaga inhabitants of north Pare developed directly into the proto-Chaga, the descendants of whom would become the focal point of the social and economic reorganization of the Kilimanjaro region in later centuries.

The grasslands and high plains were predominantly inhabited by speakers of Nilotic and Cushitic languages. The Dadoga took shape probably during these centuries, as a society of especially pastoral economy in the areas extending from the west side of the Rift Valley of far southern Kenya to the northern and central Maasai plains of Tanzania. In central Maasailand, they coexisted with specialized hunter-gatherer communities who were to maintain the Asa language down to recent times. One Bantu society, ancestral to the Sonjo, appears to have found a niche for itself in the midst of the Tato speech area, since the modern Sonjo language contains loan-words attributable to early Dagoga contacts.

The proto-Kalenjin society came into being among the Southern Nilotes who lived north of the Mau. The evolution of the society in the centuries before 1000 involved a long-term incorporation of Southern Cushitic peoples. A notable Bantu element was also incorporated, it would appear, through the practice by Kalenjin-speaking men of marrying wives from a society speaking an early version of Luyia-Gisu. From around 1000, the proto-Kalenjin proceeded to expand over considerable new territory, from Mount Elgon in the north-west as far as the southern Nyandarua range and the Rift Valley areas of central and southern Kenya. Other Kalenjin expansions carried westward into the modern-day Luyia-speaking lands south of Mount Elgon, where both Bantu and Southern Cushitic communities had apparently previously been established.

The most notable departure from these trends was the appearance of a wholly new ethnic element on the central East African scene, the Maa-Ongamo. From an origin point near the Lotuko hills of far southern Sudan, the proto-Maa-Ongamo community spread southward toward the Baringo and Laikipia regions north and north-west of Mount Kenya by about the eighth century of our era. Their initial southward expansion appears to have incorporated many of the Baz, the lowland Eastern Cushites who had previously inhabited the Turkana basin. South of Baringo and in Laikipia, the formerly dominant communities were probably Southern Nilotic and Southern Cushitic in language. Once in the Mount Kenya region, the proto-Maa-Ongamo then split into two societies. The Maa proper came to dominate the Baringo basin and Laikipia and continued to be strongly influenced by their Kalenjin neighbours on the south and west. The Old Ongamo spread south to concentrate in the plains of the Kilimanjaro and Pare Mountain region.

Economic activities

In the economy, the patterns of activity established in the preceding period still constrained the directions of change.

A strong correlation between ethnicity and the type of food production continued. Southern Nilotes had immigrated into western Kenya a thousand years before as mostly pastoral people with some cultivation of grains; their subsistence strategies had still not greatly changed even as late as 1000. With such an economy, the Nilotes understandably came into direct conflict for land with the more pastoral of the Southern Cushites; successful Southern Nilotic expansion often meant the incorporation of formerly dominant Cushite communities.

Bantu-speaking societies were largely the practitioners of planting agriculture, so called because its crops are not reproduced from seed but from parts of the cultigen itself, which are planted in the earth. They also sowed a variety of seed crops, including sorghum and, in highland areas, finger-millet, and often kept cattle. However, until very late in the first millennium, African varieties of yam continued to be a pre-eminent food source nearly everywhere among the Bantu. The early crops of the South-east Asian complex, including Asian yams, taro, and bananas, must have been taken up with particular ease by Bantu-speaking societies, by reason both of their climatic situations and their prior acquaintance with planting agriculture.

There were some exceptions to these broad tendencies. The Sonjo used extensive irrigation and manuring to cultivate a variety of crops on otherwise marginal land. The pattern they followed was one of probable Southern Cushitic inspiration, and their adoption of that pattern of life may well date back before 1000. In parts of Tanzania in the period 600–1100 could be found Bantu societies which must have placed proportionately much greater reliance on grains and other seed crops than on yams. One of these was the west Ruvu community, which moved into higher and drier lands, probably in the Kagulu area, suited to cattle-raising as well as grain crops.

Knowledge of the banana had clearly diffused well inland by the later second half of the first millennium, apparently via the Pare region as far as Mount Kenya. It was in the Pare mountains that the transition to a mature form of the highland planting agriculture apparently took place, close to the turn of the millennium. The Dawida, who had split from the proto-Ghaga and left north Pare to settle the Taita Hills around perhaps the tenth or eleventh century, continued into recent times to give priority to the yam.

The trend toward the supplanting of stone tool technology by ironworking continued through the period of the seventh to eleventh centuries. Metals seem to have entered the interior of East Africa from two directions at the turn of the era, from the west or north-west and from the east coast. The Bantu communities frequently included ironworkers among them and some knowledge of ironworking also seems to have diffused around the north of Mount Elgon as far as the Southern Nilotic peoples west of the Rift Valley, perhaps almost as early. In northern Tanzania, some of the Southern Cushites appear to have known of iron as early as the period of Bantu settlement. Their acquaintance with metals is likely to have come from the Indian Ocean seaboard, where traders from the Near East were bartering iron by not later than the

first or second century. Only in the period of the eighth to tenth centuries did the Elmenteitan tool tradition finally collapse and disappear, at a time when new iron-using immigrants, the Maa-Ongamo, were making their presence felt. By 1100 stone tools must have been relative rarities almost everywhere in the East African interior, except possibly in drier portions where hunter-gatherers may have remained for some centuries longer.

For most times and places between 600 and 1100, trade was an enterprise irregularly engaged in and serving to fill special limited needs. Certain recurring patterns of exchange existed: for instance, the exporting of obsidian from producing areas in central Kenya, where it was still being used for Elmenteitan stone blades as late as the eighth or ninth centuries, and the trading of cowrie shells inland from the east coast. But such exchanges passed progressively from community to neighbouring community without significant long-distance carriage of goods and without regular markets or merchants.

Only one occupational specialization, blacksmithing, existed in the seventh century. It would not have been an occupation universally found in interior East African societies, and many communities would have traded for their iron and so might only distantly have been acquainted with smelting or even forging until later centuries.

In about the eighth and ninth centuries, ethnic pottery distinctions partially broke down in the central Kenyan areas inhabited by the Southern Nilotes and the intruding Maa-Ongamo communities. Thereafter, a single kind of pottery, Lanet ware, began to be used by a number of Nilotic-speaking groups. Potting began to be a specialized occupation followed principally by hunter-gatherers of the Rift and Mau.

A trade in pottery also probably existed between north Pare and Kilimanjaro, the settlers being Bantu communities and the buyers most probably the Old Asa. Potting in Pare and among the Rift Valley hunters would, however, have been a part-time occupation and the existence of specialization did not thus lead immediately to the appearance of institutionalized and regular markets, but it may have led to the establishment, in several areas of central East Africa, of particular locations where people habitually went to seek out needed goods. Between Kilimanjaro and the north Pare region, which was a major area of manufacture of both iron and pots, the process may have gone even further, toward the setting up of actual regular markets by the early second millennium.

Social organization

A universal characteristic of the societies of the East African interior from the seventh to the eleventh centuries was the smallness of scale of both residential and political units. The economic base capable of supporting large polities was apparently missing.

Southern Cushitic societies seem usually to have been composed of autonomous clans, each with a recognized clan headman. Among early Bantu settlers a similar pattern, of a clan headed by a hereditary clan chief, can be reconstructed as typical. Bantu clan chiefship was an actively political position, with responsibilities in most areas of community life, whereas the Cushitic clan headman may principally have been concerned with the allotment of land.

Among the proto-Chaga, there arose a new kind of chiefly position, in which the chief was not tied to a single clan but ruled over a territory inhabited by people of different clan affiliations. This development appears to coincide with the emergence of mature highland planting agriculture. It can be suggested that this planting system gave a decisive productive advantage to the earliest Chaga and so set off Chaga expansion; the chiefly role provided an integrative focus for the assimilation of people of different ethnic, and hence different kin, affiliations.

The largest scale of potential social and political co-operation was probably reached, however, by the Southern Nilotes and Maa-Ongamo peoples. The age-set institutions of these communities drew together all the young men from all the neighbourhoods of homesteads over a wide area. By belonging to a common age-set, men from distant areas gained a basis for co-operating in raiding other peoples when young and for keeping peace with one another in their maturity. Possession of such institutions probably helps to explain why Nilotic language and Nilotic ethnic identity tended to supplant Southern Cushitic in the long run. When conflict arose, or when other troubles such as famine struck, the Nilotes had, at least potentially, a wider group of people from whom support might be sought.

In this connection, the disappearance of age organization among many Bantu of eastern Africa, and of circumcision also, becomes an interesting problem. In the interior regions, the early Bantu settlers circumcised their boys and formed them into age-sets. Yet several Bantu societies in southern Tanzania (which often preserved older features of culture lost farther north, such as matrilineal descent and clan chiefship) nevertheless dropped circumcision and age grouping at undetermined but probably quite early times in their histories. Circumcision tended rather to be preserved only where there were neighbouring Southern Cushitic and Southern Nilotic societies, who also had this practice. In some cases, this kind of influence could be quite strong and had its most significant impact during the period of the seventh to eleventh centuries. One set of examples are the generation-set systems of the Thagicu peoples of Mount Kenya, for which a partially Southern Nilotic inspiration, dating at the latest to proto-Thagicu times, must be presumed. A second notable case is that of the Chaga, whose age-set ideas show a major Maa-Ongamo contribution, probably specifically from the Old Ongamo during the proto-Chaga period at the turn of the millennium. What can be suggested is that age-sets served no compelling need in more southerly areas, where only sparse hunter-gatherer populations greeted Bantu settlement. Farther north, however, the adoption of Nilotic models sometimes provided effective new means of incorporating non-Bantu into Bantu societies and of coping with the pressures, in the later first and very early second millennia, of new Nilotic expansions.

Religious systems

Most peoples followed one or the other of two major religious systems.

Across much of the Kenya interior and south through central Tanzania, there prevailed the belief in a single divinity, usually identified metaphorically with the sky. The existence of evil was understood in this religion to derive usually from divine retribution or judgement. Versions of the religion among Cushitic-speaking peoples

sometimes added a belief in lesser spirits capable of harm, and some of the Rift Southern Cushites had developed a different celestial metaphor, linking divinity to the sun rather than to the sky in general. This latter variety of the religion had been adopted some centuries before by the Southern Nilotic ancestors of the Tato and the pre-Kalenjin.

In the southern half of the East African interior, a different religion prevailed. Brought in by Bantu settlers, this set of beliefs recognized the existence of a creator god, but its primary religious observances were directed toward the ancestors. Evil was attributed most often to human malice and envy, to the work of 'witches' or 'sorcerers'.

In the central East African interior, where both religions were practised, the trend of the past 2000 years has been toward blending the elements of the two philosophies. In western Kenya, the idea of the ancestors as an important focus of religious observance diffused, presumably from the pre-Luyia-Gisu, eastward to the pre-Kalenjin during that era, and the concept of witchcraft had apparently become part of the Kalenjin explanation of evil by the end of the first millennium also. In north Pare and adjoining areas of Kilimanjaro, the god-sun metaphor took hold in proto-Chaga religious thought at around the beginning of the second millennium. The proto-Chaga incorporation of Old Asa-speakers apparently added Southern Cushitic concepts of divinity to a still active concern for the ancestors, derived from the Bantu portion of the Chaga heritage.

Conclusion

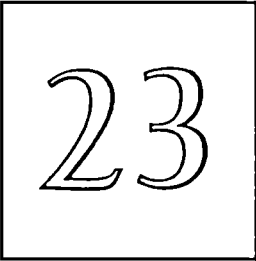
Although the half millennium between 600 and 1100 was not an era of sweeping change, it was still a period marked by lesser changes in different parts of the wider region. Variation in domestic economy continued to follow the ethnic and geographical distributions already laid down: planting agriculture with some grain cultivation tended to be pursued by Bantu-speakers, while different combinations of grain cultivation with livestock-raising were engaged in by Nilotes and Cushites. Hunter-gatherers of Khoisan language may still have had parts of western and south-eastern Tanzania almost entirely to themselves. At the same time considerable transfer of non-material and even material culture between societies is evident; the beginning of economic specialization took hold in some areas; and, in a number of instances, notable new amalgamations of peoples arose. The most striking instance, the melting of Nilotes, Southern Cushites and Bantu into the proto-Chaga, created a truly new society which incorporated basic ideas and practices from each of the three cultural backgrounds.

A characteristic of the period was the marked insulation of the East African interior from the currents of change so prominent in the Indian Ocean. A few crops of Indonesian source, such as the banana, had begun spreading inland in the period preceding the seventh century, but the agriculture itself was built up of ideas and practices owing nothing to contemporary Indian Ocean influences.

Trade appears not at all to have penetrated the East African interior. A few shells reached far inland, passing by way of small-scale local exchanges from community to community; but apparently the East African hinterland offered nothing of interest to Indian Ocean commerce, which was also not available within a few kilometres of the

shore. Interior peoples were able to supply their material needs throughout the period and for centuries still to come.

One other major development, of considerable long-range importance but less overtly visible in the East African interior, may have been under way during the second half of the first millennium. The more intensive exploitation of the land which is implied in the farming practices of most Bantu societies of that period suggests that Bantu-speaking areas had already begun to be areas of build-up of population. In the second millennium, those areas increasingly became population reservoirs, out of which many of the more significant population movements and most of the major currents of change were to flow.



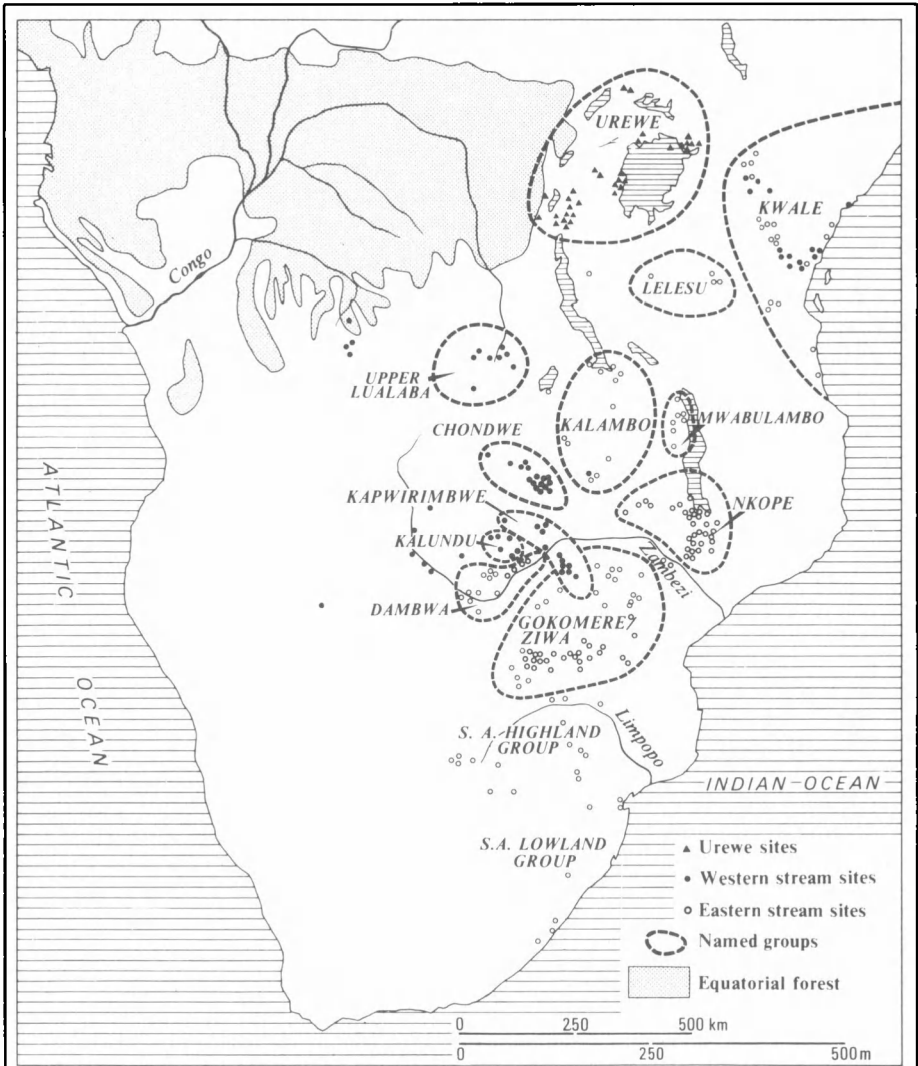
*Central Africa
to the north
of the Zambezi*

The start of the Iron Age

By the beginning of the period with which this chapter is primarily concerned, almost all the region under consideration was occupied by Early Iron Age peoples, many of whom may have been speakers of Bantu languages. In many areas, remnants of technologically distinct earlier populations continued to live alongside the Early Iron Age folk, from whom they may also have been differentiated linguistically. The cultural entity to the south of the equatorial forest as a whole is referred to as the Early Iron Age industrial complex; it is subdivided into an eastern stream and a western stream. On the basis of the typology of the various pottery wares, several geographically restricted groups are recognized within each stream. Each group is named after the site at which its associated pottery was first recognized and described. A certain correspondence may be observed between the expansion processes and the relative chronology of these streams on the one hand, and the linguistically reconstructed course of the spread of the Bantu languages on the other. Both streams appear to be derived, at least in part, from the Urewe settlements of the interlacustrine region during the closing centuries of the last millennium before our era.

The eastern stream's expansion may have begun around the second century of our era with the inception of the Kwale-ware tradition in the coastal regions of Kenya and Tanzania; its main southward extension was not achieved until the fourth century, when Early Iron Age culture was brought to most parts of eastern subequatorial Africa as far to the south as the Transvaal and southern Mozambique. It was at this stage that Early Iron Age settlement of the eastern stream took place in the more easterly parts of the region, i.e. in Malawi and in those parts of Zambia which lie to the east of the Luangwa river. A later expansion of the eastern stream, from a centre south of the Zambezi in what is now Zimbabwe, took place in about the sixth century, but affected only a very small part of our present region – the Victoria Falls area in the extreme south of Zambia.

It has been suggested that the western stream arose, around the beginning of the Christian era, in the country south of the lower Congo, through the fusion or interaction of two distinct Bantu-speaking populations. One of these appears to have penetrated through the equatorial forests directly southward from the original centre



23.1 Archaeological cultures in eastern and southern Africa. (D. W. Phillipson)

of Bantu speech in what is now Cameroon. It is probably represented in the archaeological record by the so-called 'Leopoldian neolithic' of Lower Zaïre.

The second Bantu-speaking element appears, like the later eastern stream, to have been an offshoot of the Urewe settlements of the interlacustrine region. Most probably it was by means of this southwards and westwards expansion around the forest fringes that domestic cattle and sheep, as well as cereal agriculture and, perhaps, knowledge of metallurgical techniques, were brought to the south-western savanna. These developments may have given rise to a southward expansion of Iron Age culture from Kongo country, through Angola into northern Namibia, accompanied by Bantu languages ancestral to such modern tongues as Moundu and Herero. The only dated archaeological site which may be attributed to an early phase of this expansion is at Benfica, on the Atlantic coast near Luanda, where pottery showing strong affinity to that of the Early Iron Age of other western stream areas occurs in the second century of the Christian era.

Moreover, certain elements of Early Iron Age culture, i.e. knowledge of pottery manufacture and the herding of sheep and cattle, appear to have been transmitted to the Khoisan-speakers of southern Namibia and the western Cape – far beyond the southernmost limit of Bantu penetration – by about the second or third century of the Christian era. Since it is hard to envisage a source for these innovations other than the western stream of the Early Iron Age, their date may be interpreted as providing a *terminus ante quem* for the latter's expansion into southern Angola.

The outline presented above is not contradicted by those conclusions of comparative Bantu linguists that can be used to form the basis of historical reconstruction of Bantu language development. The western stream's original dispersal from Kongo country to the south of the lower reaches of the Congo river may be correlated with a secondary centre of Bantu language dispersal which has been placed in just this area as a result of recent linguistic studies. The Bantu speech spread directly southwards from its Cameroonian homeland by either a coastal or a river route to the area that is now Lower Zaïre. This would have been a movement quite independent from that which brought another Bantu language along the northern fringes of the forest to the interlacustrine region. Those Bantu languages which have been spoken in recent times to the south of the equatorial forest all appear to be derived, directly or indirectly, from a centre of dispersal near Lower Zaïre. The first stage of dispersal from this centre appears to have given rise to languages ancestral to the Western Highland group, spoken today through highland Angola and southwards into northern Namibia.

The western stream of the Early Iron Age

Chronologically, the earliest of the relevant prehistoric industries is that from Lower Zaïre, which has conventionally been known as the 'Leopoldian neolithic'. It is characterized by necked pottery vessels with elaborate grooved decoration. No metal artefacts are associated with this pottery; instead there are abundant ground stone 'axes'. Material attributed to this industry is known from the Kinshasa area on the southern side of the Malebo (Stanley) Pool, and from there westwards to near the Atlantic seaboard, occurring mainly in the caves and rock-shelters of the province of Lower

Zaire. No trace of this industry has yet been discerned in the more open savanna country of northern Angola. This observation, coupled both with the apparently sudden appearance of ground stone artefacts in this one restricted part of a region where they are otherwise extremely rare, and also with the occurrence of comparable industries to the north of the forest, in West Africa and on the island of Fernando Po, indicates that the 'Leopoldian neolithic' was introduced to the Lower Zaire region from an essentially northerly direction.

In other occurrences in Lower Zaire which may be assumed to post-date the 'neolithic' material noted above, more varied pottery has been recovered which shows rather stronger similarities to that known in Early Iron Age contexts further to the east. In particular, affinities with the Urewe ware seem to be much closer in this material, notably that from Dimba cave near Mbanza Ngungu, than they are in the 'Leopoldian neolithic'. Further to the south, as noted above, pottery from Benfica also shows strong Early Iron Age affinities: it is dated to about the second century of our era, and this would be a plausible date for the Lower Zaire material also.

Our knowledge of the Early Iron Age in more inland regions of Angola and in the neighbouring Kasai province of Zaire is even more scanty. Near Tshikapa, close to Kasai's southern border, mining operations in the Lupembe valley yielded four nearly complete pottery vessels which would not be out of place typologically in an assemblage of Urewe ware from the interlacustrine region. Not far to the south, across the Angola border, two small collections of pottery from the Dundo area are dated to the last quarter of the first millennium of the Christian era. The sherds differ markedly from the (presumably earlier) Tshikapa specimens, but nevertheless show several Early Iron Age typological features alongside characteristics which have continued into the modern pottery of northern Angola. By the seventh or eighth century, a substantial Iron Age settlement had been established at Feti la Choya, near the confluence of the Kunene and Kunyongauna rivers. In the extreme north of Namibia, at Kapako close to the western end of the Caprivi Strip, a site with traces of ironworking has yielded pottery related to other wares of the Early Iron Age's western stream, notably that from Kapwirimbwe.

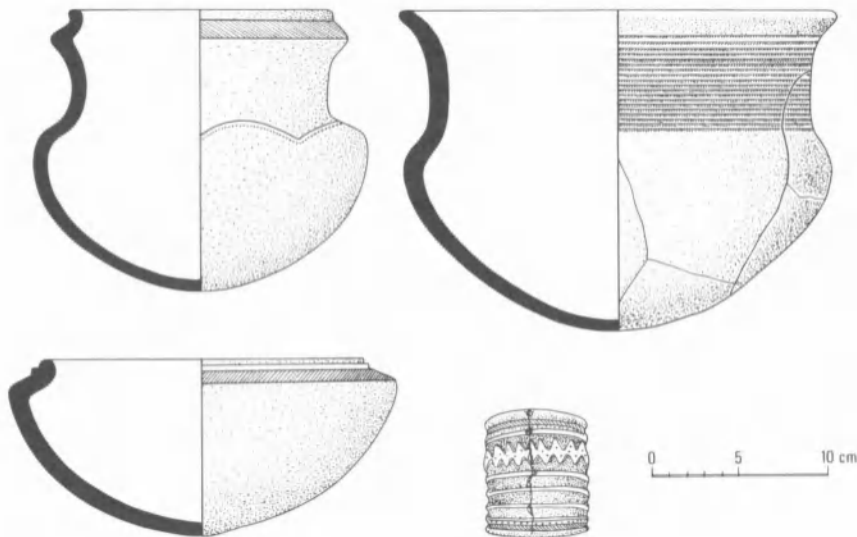
Our most detailed knowledge of the archaeology of the western stream of the Early Iron Age comes from the Upemba depression in the valley of the upper Lualaba in Shaba. The earliest Iron Age settlement is at Kamilamba, dated to about the sixth or seventh century of the Christian era. The pottery shows strong affinities with material of the same age from western Zambia. In about the tenth century, or shortly before, there began the use of an extensive series of cemeteries, which have been investigated on several occasions during the last twenty years, the best known being that at Sanga on Lake Kisale. The Sanga cemetery appears to have remained in use until about the seventeenth or eighteenth century, but throughout this period the typology of the associated pottery seems to have been rooted in an Early Iron Age tradition.

The dead were buried in an extended or slightly flexed position, accompanied by abundant grave goods. The most frequent items were pottery vessels, those prior to c. 1300 of the Christian era being of the style known as Kisalian, followed by those attributed to the Kabambian tradition. Metal objects were also abundant, including elaborate copper ornaments such as chains, bangles and twisted belts and necklets. Iron



23.2 Tomb from the classical Kisalian period (tenth to fourteenth centuries), Sanga site. (P. de Maret, Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale)

23.3 Pottery and an ivory bangle from Sanga. (J. Nenquin, 1963; J. Hiernaux, E. de Longrée and J. de Buyst, 1971)



is represented by hoes and axes rather than by weapons: there are also a number of small flange-welded bells. Cross-shaped copper ingots of various sizes were common in Kabambian graves but rare in Kisalian ones; there is evidence that these probably served as some form of currency.

Some 140 kilometres further upstream along the Lualaba is the site of Katoto, where there is a further cemetery in many ways comparable with those of the Upemba depression. The pottery belongs to an Early Iron Age tradition, although it has stronger affinities than does the Kasalian both with Urewe ware and with ceramics from western Zambia. It is probable that Katoto will prove to be of earlier date than the Sanga cemetery.

The Lualaba sites do, however, attest to the material wealth and technological sophistication which had been attained in this area by the beginning of the present millennium. A relatively high population density had evidently developed by this time, and a major factor contributing to this was the presence of the rich mineral deposits of the copper belt. This mining area attracted trading contacts over an enormous area among the Early Iron Age folk, even though mining remained on a relatively small scale. This sequence is of particular importance and interest, since it occurs in an area where oral traditions have placed the origin of Luba kingship, to which many kingdoms of the central savanna trace their origin.

Numerous Early Iron Age settlement sites have been located on the copper belt and these are attributed to the Chondwe group, named after a site some 45 kilometres south of Ndola. Copper bangles have been found at Chondwe at a level dated to between the sixth and the eighth centuries of our era; impressions of similar objects used to decorate pottery strongly suggest that the use of copper most probably goes back to the first Early Iron Age settlement of the area, about the beginning of the sixth century.

Scattered Early Iron Age potsherds of types which are characteristic, not of the local Chondwe group pottery tradition, but of that of distant regions – the middle Zambezi valley and southern Malawi, for example – are present at several sites. These occurrences are probably best interpreted as evidence for intergroup contact. This contact took the form of men travelling from afar to the copper-producing area in order to obtain metal. Since there is reason to believe that, during the Early Iron Age in this part of Africa, potting was the work of men, it is likely that the 'foreign' pottery referred to above was made by these visitors: there is thus no need to suppose either that whole families travelled to the mines in search of metal or that such fragile objects as pots were themselves traded over large distances.

To the west of the main copper belt, on the Zambezi/Congo watershed near Solwezi, the prehistoric mining area at Kansanshi has recently been investigated. Here, the earliest Iron Age occupation, of about the fifth century, is associated with evidence for copper-working. The pottery is distinct from that of the Chondwe group and shares features with wares found on widely dispersed sites in the Kalahari Sand country of western Zambia. Here, the most informative sites are those at Sioma on the upper Zambezi not far to the south of the Barotse floodplain, and at Lubusi in the Kaoma district. Early Iron Age settlement, associated with the working of iron and (to judge from bangle impressions on the pottery) copper, is attested from the sixth century, if not the end of the fifth. Only along the Zambezi valley does the

coverage of research enable the distribution of these sites to be plotted with any degree of comprehensiveness.

The only other areas of Zambia to be subject to western stream settlement are the Lusaka and Southern Province plateaux, where the Early Iron Age sites are attributed to the Kapwirimbwe and Kalundu groups respectively. The pottery of the first of these, where the brief period of occupation is dated to about the fifth century, shows many affinities to that of the Chondwe group on the copper belt. Large quantities of debris from collapsed *daga* (puddled mud) structures appear to be the remains of iron-smelting furnaces: the working of iron seems to have been conducted on a large scale within or immediately adjacent to the village, but copper was unknown.

The later phases of the Kapwirimbwe group are best known from a site at Twickenham Road in suburban Lusaka. At some time between the ninth and the early twelfth centuries, fine, elaborately decorated, pottery was in use, which clearly belongs to a development of the same tradition as was represented at Kapwirimbwe. Domestic goats were kept, and wild animals hunted. Iron was worked on a substantial scale, but it was only in the final phase of the Early Iron Age at Twickenham Road that copper made its appearance. At both Kapwirimbwe and Twickenham Road perforated pottery colanders were recovered, which, it is suggested, may have been used for the preparation of salt.

The former extent of the Kapwirimbwe group is not easy to ascertain but closely related pottery has been recorded from as far to the west as Mumbwa Cave and from the Chirundu region of the Zambezi valley. The Early Iron Age 'Sinoia tradition' ceramics of the Lomagundi and Urungwe districts of Zimbabwe is so similar to that from Kapwirimbwe and Twickenham Road that it also is probably best subsumed into the same group. These sites are quite distinct from their contemporaries in other parts of Zimbabwe and are of interest as the only representatives of the western stream of the Early Iron Age yet to have been identified south of the Zambezi.

In the Southern Province or Batoka plateau south of the Kafue, the first Kalundu group settlements may have been established before the end of the fourth century. The pottery and other items of material culture have much in common with those of the Kapwirimbwe group. At Kalundu Mound near Kalowo, domestic animals (cattle and sheep/goats) accounted for less than two-fifths of the bones recovered, indicating that hunting still played an important part in the economy.

The eastern stream of the Early Iron Age

In Malawi and eastern Zambia, the Early Iron Age industries are markedly distinct. They are attributed to an eastern stream and appear to be derived reasonably directly from the Urewe group settlements of the interlacustrine region.

Two variants can be recognized in the Early Iron Age of Malawi: the Mwabulambo group in the north, named after a site on the Lufilya river, and – in the south – the Nkope group, which takes its name from a locality on the western shore of Lake Malawi, north of Mangochi. The nature and location of the geographical boundary between these two groups is not well known. The distribution of Nkope ware extends westwards into the greater part of south-eastern Zambia, while its spread into adjacent

parts of Mozambique is attested by material collected by Carl Wiese in 1907. The radio-carbon dates for Malawi Early Iron Age sites indicate that their florescence began early in the fourth century of the Christian era; and it has been shown statistically that the Mwabulambo group may have been established at a slightly earlier date than its more southerly counterpart.

Traces of substantial houses, built of mud applied over a wooden framework (pole and *daga*), were preserved at Phopo Hill near Lake Kazuni. Iron, in the form of slag and finished artefacts, has been recovered from several sites, notably Nanyangu in the Ncheu district and Zomba range. Copper, on the other hand, has not been recovered. Shell beads occurred in association with Nkope ware in a storage pit at Phwadze stream in the Chikwawa district, which is dated to the fifth or sixth century of the Christian era. The only coastal object from an Early Iron Age context in Malawi is a broken cowrie shell from a late Nkope site on the Namichimba stream, Mwanya.

It is necessary now to turn our attention to the Early Iron Age in the Victoria Falls region of southern Zambia. This has been termed the Dambwa group. The distribution of the Dambwa group extends along the Zambezi valley from the vicinity of Chirundu upstream almost as far as Sioma, and also southwards at least into the Wankie area of Zimbabwe. There can be little doubt that the Dambwa group owes its origin to a north-westwards expansion of eastern-stream Early Iron Age folk from the Zimbabwe plateau. The main florescence of the Dambwa group in the Victoria Falls region did not begin until the sixth century of the Christian era. This was significantly later than the inception of western-stream settlement in the areas only a short distance to the north.

The best-known sites of the Dambwa group are Kumadzulo, occupied between the fifth and seventh centuries, and the slightly later settlement of Dambwa. Sites of the Dambwa group have yielded bones of domestic cattle and small stock, in addition to those of wild animals. Traces of buildings at Kamadzulo are interpreted as the remains of remarkably small rectangular pole-and-*daga* houses. Contact with the east coast trade had begun by the seventh century, as is indicated by a fragment of imported glass recovered from the ruins of one of the houses at Kumadzulo, and by some cowrie shells from the nearby Chundu Farm site. Glass beads, however, do not occur in Early Iron Age contexts in this area. Locally made iron tools include hoes, axes, knives, spear-points and arrowheads. A copper bar and some copper bangles have also been recovered, indicating trade with copper-producing areas such as the Hook of the Kafue or the Wankie region of Zimbabwe.

Excavations at Chundu Farm have thrown much light on the local Early Iron Age burial customs, which may be compared with those that prevailed during somewhat later times in the upper Lualaba cemeteries, described above. The dead were buried tightly contracted in individual pit-like graves while similar pits were dug nearby for the deposition of grave goods. These usually comprised pairs of pottery vessels forming a covered container for a funerary cache of such objects as iron hoes, axes, iron or copper bangles, cowrie shells or shell beads. The Chundu Farm site is dated to about the eighth century of the Christian era.

The Early Iron Age/Later Iron Age transition

In many parts of Bantu-speaking Africa, the Later Iron Age societies have been less intensively studied by archaeologists than have their Early Iron Age predecessors. Consequently, at least for the period with which we are concerned here, before that at which oral tradition becomes a significant historical source, the centuries after about 1000 of the Christian era represent a virtual lacuna in our knowledge of Central African history. Despite the lack of abundant data, however, a picture is beginning to emerge of a sharp break in the local pottery traditions of most areas early in the eleventh century of the Christian era. One of the few areas where some degree of continuity over this period may be demonstrated is in southern Zambia.

The relevant archaeological material here is that attributed to the Kalomo industry, which developed from a late phase of the Dambwa group sequence of the Victoria Falls region. Thence, around the end of the ninth century of our era, its practitioners appear to have begun to expand to the north and north-west on to the Batoka plateau, where their characteristic pottery rapidly displaced that of the Early Iron Age Kalundu group. The best picture of the Kalomo industry as a whole is obtained at Isamu Pati, west of Kalomo, a site where there was no previous Early Iron Age occupation.

Ironworking seems to have been practised by the inhabitants of these Kalomo industry sites on a smaller scale than by their Early Iron Age predecessors. Although axes and hoes have been found, they are extremely rare, knives, razors and points for spears and arrows being the tools most frequently encountered. Copper was used mainly for bangles. There is evidence for the cultivation of sorghum, but the impression gained is that here the economy of the opening centuries of the Later Iron Age was heavily dependent upon the herding of domestic animals, principally cattle. The presence of glass beads, cowrie shells and conus shells shows that contact with the east coast trade was now stronger than it had been in earlier times.

In about the second half of the eleventh century of our era, the Kalomo industry on the Batoka plateau was abruptly replaced by a southward spread of a further distinct industry, known as Kangila, which seems to have originated in or near the lower Kafue valley. The Kangila industry also spread to the Victoria Falls region, where its interface with the Kalomo industry is dated at Sinde about a hundred years later than the corresponding event on the plateau: this time-lag may be regarded as a function of the slow southwards dispersal of the Kangila industry. Excavations have been made at only two sites – Sebanzi near Monze and Ingombe Ilede not far from the Zambezi-Kafue confluence. At the latter site, the occupation probably began in the seventh or eighth centuries: the corresponding event at Sebanzi was probably later. The pottery may be confidently regarded as ancestral to that found at Kangila on the plateau near Mazabuka. The Kangila village itself was occupied briefly in about the fifteenth century of the Christian era, and thus represents a late phase of the industry to which it has given its name.

Outside the Southern Province, the most widespread Later Iron Age pottery type recognized in Zambia is that attributed to the Luangwa tradition. Its distribution covers the whole of Zambia to the north and east of a line extending from the lower Kafue to Lubumbashi, and extends also into the neighbouring parts of Zaïre, Malawi,

Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The Luangwa tradition thus occurs in areas where the Early Iron Age had belonged to the Kalambo, Nkope, Chondwe and Kapwimbwe groups, representing both the eastern and the western streams. It first appears during the eleventh century of the Christian era, and makes a sudden and complete break with the preceding Early Iron Age traditions. Throughout its area of distribution, the Luangwa pottery tradition has been continued into recent times by such peoples as the Bemba, Chewa, Nsenga and northern Lunda.

There is a very pronounced contrast between the pottery of the Luangwa tradition and that of its Early Iron Age predecessors, and no suggestion of a gradual development from one to the other. However, the Early Iron Age ware which is typologically closest to the Luangwa tradition is that of the Chondwe group. The ancestor of the Luangwa tradition seems to have been more closely related to the Chondwe group pottery than to that of any other of the Early Iron Age groups which are at present known. The inception of the Luangwa tradition was occasioned probably by a relatively large-scale movement of people, in which whole families took part, from an area located to the north or north-west of the Zambia-Shaba copper belt. If Luangwa tradition pottery was then (as it invariably is today) the work of women, the suddenness of its appearance may be explained by postulating that Early Iron Age ceramics were made by men.

A similar picture is now emerging in Malawi, Nkope ware being replaced around 1000 of the Christian era by that named after Kapeni Hill in the Ncheu district. At about the same time, Nwamasapa ware took over from Mwabulambo ware as the characteristic pottery type in the northern part of the country. Both these Malawi Later Iron Age wares appear to be related in some way to those of the Luangwa tradition. Pole-and-*daga* houses are indicated at some sites, as also are less permanent beehive-shaped structures. Iron and occasional copper objects were in use throughout this period. Imported glass beads, initially rare, became progressively more frequent. Seeds of sorghum have been recovered in association with Mwamasapa pottery, while cattle bones occur on several Later Iron Age sites, widely distributed through Malawi.

To the west of the area occupied by industries of the Luangwa tradition there is apparent a much greater degree of continuity from the ceramic industries of the Early Iron Age into those of the present millennium. For example, in the Mongu, Kabompo, Zambezi, Mwinilunga and Kaoma districts of western Zambia the modern pottery tradition, which has been named the Lungwebungu tradition, shows many features in common with that of the local Early Iron Age, as exemplified at the Lubusi site described above. There is no evidence here for a pronounced break in the archaeological record early in the present millennium, such as heralded the advent of the Later Iron Age further to the east. In the country now occupied by the Kaonde, yet another pottery style is attested at sites such as Kamusongolwa and Kansanshi, dated between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries.

Conclusion

It is now necessary to turn away from purely archaeological arguments in order to consider the meaning and significance of these observations in historical terms.

The first point to be emphasized is the much greater degree of Early Iron Age/Later

Iron Age continuity in the western half of Central Africa, in contrast to the situation in the east. Interestingly, this east-west division does not coincide with the ethnic subdivisions of the region, as reflected in the extant oral tradition. For example, peoples who traditionally trace their origins to the Lunda and Luba empires are found in both the eastern and the western areas. Furthermore, there are today groups bearing the name of Lunda which make, in one case, Luangwa pottery (Kazembe's Lunda of the Luapula valley) and, in the other, that of the Early Iron Age-derived Lungwebungu tradition (the western Lunda of north-western Zambia). It is thus clear that the inception of the Later Iron Age and the traditionally recalled emergence of its constituent societies were essentially disparate processes. This is confirmed by the chronological implications of the most recent interpretation of the oral traditions, which would place the political developments that gave rise to the Luba empire as early as the fourteenth or even the thirteenth century – a date still significantly more recent than that attested by archaeology for the start of the Later Iron Age.

It is when we compare the archaeological data with the linguistic that it is possible tentatively to propose a meaningful correlation. Attention was drawn above to the Western Highland group of the Bantu languages, which is derived from a dispersal centre near the lower Congo. Subsequent to the establishment of these Western Highland languages, they themselves gave rise to a tertiary dispersal centre in the Shaba area. It is to this centre that most linguists would now trace the last major diaspora of the Bantu languages, that which led to the introduction, throughout the eastern half of Bantu Africa, of the closely interrelated languages called the Eastern Highland group. There are grounds for linking the inception of the Later Iron Age industries in the eastern regions with the spread of the people who spoke these Eastern Highland languages. The continuation of the older and more diverse western languages compares with the greater degree of Early Iron Age/Later Iron Age continuity in the west. The geographical distribution of the Eastern Highland languages coincides with the area where a sharp break in the archaeological sequence took place at the start of the Later Iron Age.

This is the picture which archaeology and linguistics combine to present as that of Central Africa from the seventh to the eleventh centuries of the Christian era. Throughout the region, Early Iron Age people, probably Bantu-speakers, were in occupation by the beginning of this period, although in many areas stone-tool-using hunter-gathering peoples continued to survive, often in a client relationship with their farming neighbours. They were evidently peasant farming societies, probably lacking any large-scale systems of centralized political authority. Towards the close of the first millennium we can, however, detect a marked increase in wealth, trade activity and population density in the upper Lualaba area. It was from this general region that, in about the eleventh century, began the process of population expansion that resulted in the introduction of Later Iron Age culture to much of eastern Central Africa. Thus were established the populations from which the more developed, Later Iron Age societies subsequently emerged.



*Southern Africa
to the south
of the Zambezi*

Ethnic movements and culture systems: 700–1000

Archaeologists in Southern Africa use ceramic style to trace the movements of Iron Age people because stylistic units demarcate the distribution of ethnic entities in space and time. This is so because: (1) ceramic style is created and transmitted through groups of people; (2) the transmission of a style must be partially accomplished through verbal communication; and (3) as long as the identity of the manufacturers and users of style is the same, the distribution of that style must also represent the distribution of a group of people speaking the same language.

On the basis of these premises, the languages spoken by Iron Age people in Central and Southern Africa can be identified as belonging to the Bantu family. Since the earliest Iron Age ceramics in this region belong to a single stylistic complex and since one of these styles can be traced directly to the ceramics of modern-day Shona-speakers, this ceramic continuum is sufficient to establish the link between Iron Age entities and Bantu languages.

By 700 several ethnic groups of Bantu-speakers lived in Southern Africa. One group, named after the present-day town of Sinoia, had only recently moved across the Zambezi, but the ancestors of the others had been in the general area since the beginning of the Iron Age. The area with which we are most concerned – modern-day south-west Matabeleland, east central Botswana and the far northern Transvaal – was occupied largely by Zhizo people. They inhabited this area for another 250 years before newcomers known as Leopard's Kopje moved into south-west Zimbabwe. This later ethnic movement is demonstrated by a major stylistic discontinuity between Zhizo and tenth-century Leopard's Kopje ceramics. This ceramic disjunction occurs at the same time as a threefold increase in late Zhizo settlements called Toutswe in Botswana. Evidently, many Zhizo people chose to leave the area rather than be incorporated in the new Leopard's Kopje group.

Some archaeologists believe that the spread of Leopard's Kopje in 1000 was part of a single expansion of Bantu-speakers from Central Africa across the subcontinent. Leopard's Kopje ceramics, however, are not closely related to contemporaneous styles in Zambia or Malawi. Instead, Leopard's Kopje forms the third phase of a stylistic continuum that includes eighth–ninth-century Klingbeil ceramics and

fifth-seventh-century pottery in the central Transvaal. Furthermore, the tenth-century replacement of Zhizo in south-western Zimbabwe by Leopard's Kopje and then the eleventh-century replacement of Maxton people in northern Zimbabwe by a group related to Leopard's Kopje known as Gumanye (formerly Zimbabwe Period II and Lower Zimbabwe) show that these Leopard's Kopje people moved north across the Limpopo river, not south across the Zambezi.

Leopard's Kopje and Gumanye are part of the ceramic continuum mentioned earlier that links Bantu language with Iron Age peoples. They were therefore the ancestors of many present-day Shona-speakers.

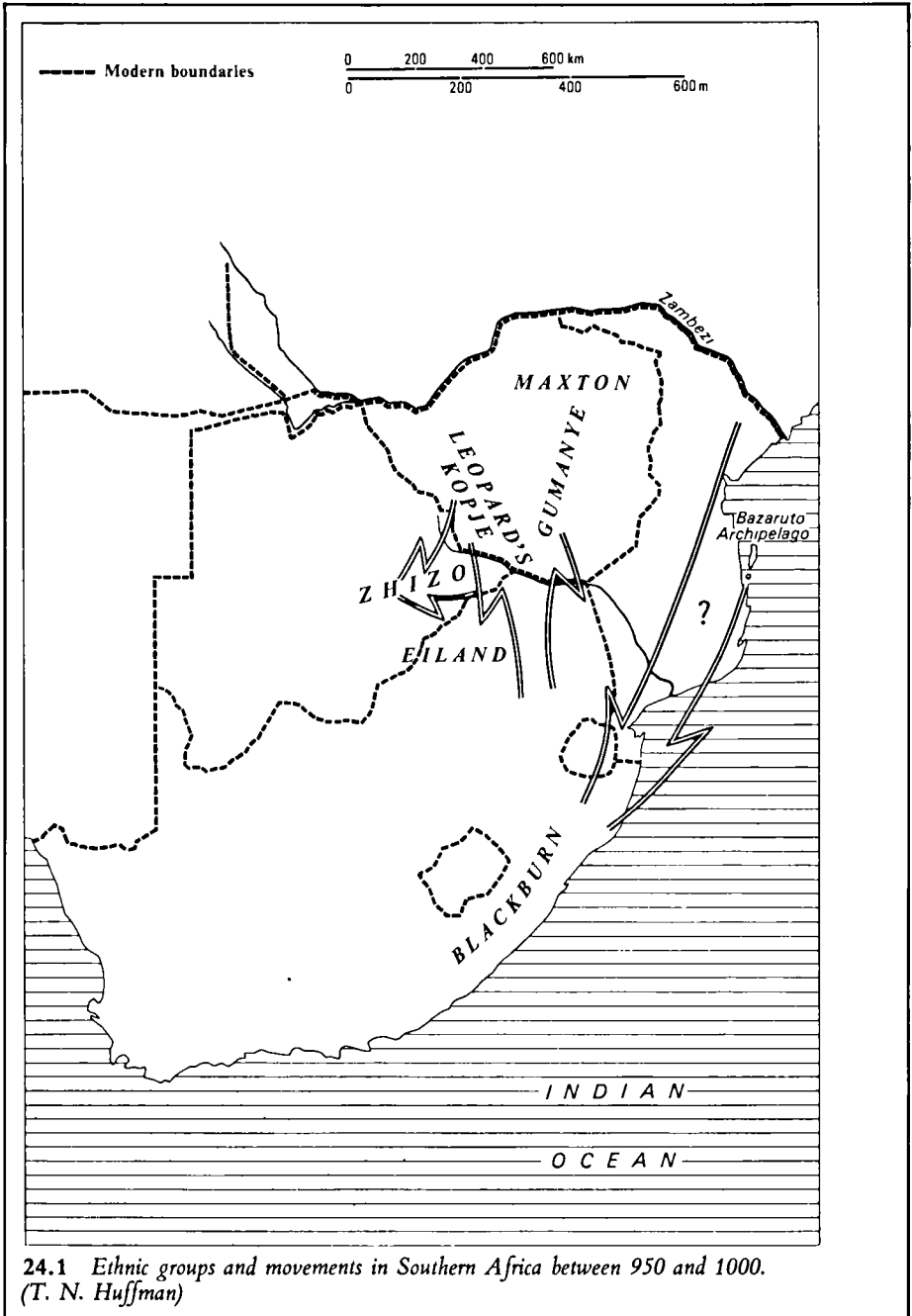
The location and type of Iron Age sites, as well as the associated artefacts, show that these people were mixed farmers. Most early Iron Age settlements were located in broken country where water, wood, cultivable soils and pasture occurred in close proximity. In contrast, pastoralists preferred open grasslands like the Kalahari, while hunter-gatherers once occupied almost every kind of terrain. Iron Age settlements were relatively permanent compared with the transient camps of herders and hunter-gatherers. The features and artefacts in these semipermanent settlements include storage pits, raised storage bins, grindstones and iron hoes, all of which indicate a technology adapted to grain cultivation. Some of the actual crops have also been recovered from Iron Age sites: carbonized sorghum has been found in Zhizo, Toutswe and Leopard's Kopje sites, while *Eleusine* (finger-millet) and *Penisetum* (bulrush millet) have also been recovered from Leopard's Kopje sites; and various legumes are known from Sinoia and Leopard's Kopje sites.

A herding component is also well attested in the archaeological record for the seventh to eleventh centuries, for bones of domestic caprines (sheep and goat) and cattle have been found in virtually every known Iron Age group at this time. Until recently, though, it was commonly thought that Leopard's Kopje were the first people in Southern Africa to begin cattle-keeping on a large scale. This in turn was part of a belief that two distinct economies existed during the Iron Age: an Early Iron Age one centred on cultivation, and a Later Iron Age economy based on cattle. Recent research, however, invalidates this economic distinction.

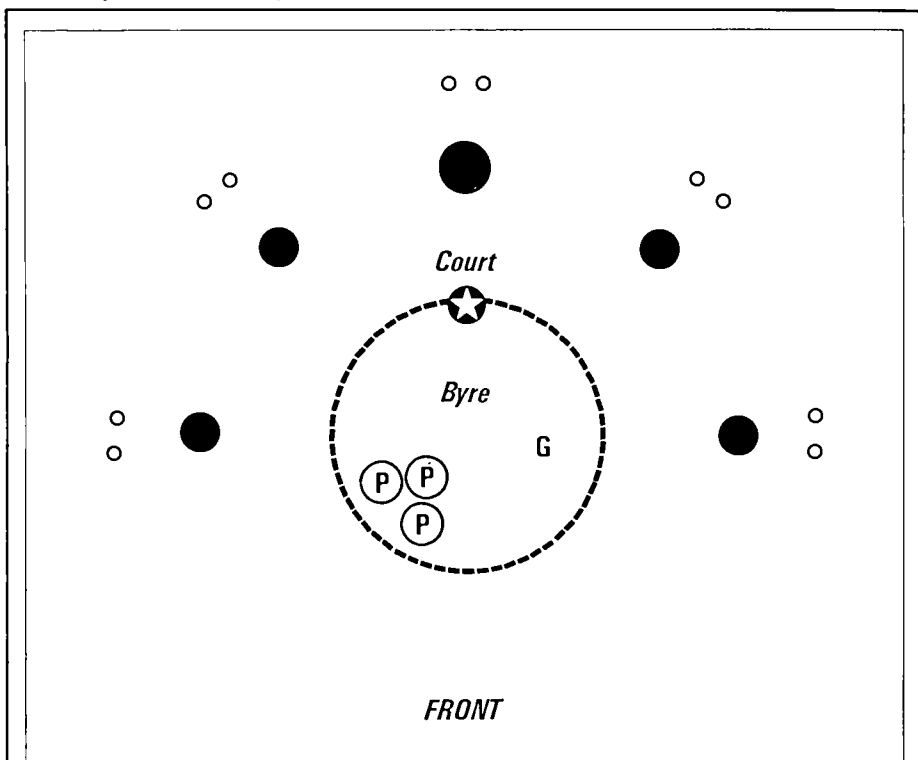
An extensive reconnaissance along the eastern fringe of the Kalahari in Botswana discovered that both eighth- to ninth-century Zhizo and tenth- to eleventh-century Toutswe sites are characterized by thick deposits of cattle dung, Zhizo people along the edge of the Kalahari apparently kept more cattle than their Zhizo relatives to the east. Economic variation between Iron Age communities was more probably due to conscious decisions about exploiting environmental and political opportunities than to fixed historical or cultural traditions. Recent research also shows that nearly all Iron Age people shared the same attitudes to cattle, regardless of whether they kept large herds.

It is possible to use the organization of space to determine the culture system of Iron Age groups because the use of space is a cultural variable: every society divides its spatial environment into distinct locations where a limited range of culturally related activities is permitted.

This Bantu cattle culture is characterized by a cluster of interrelated values concerning the political role of men, the benevolence of ancestor spirits and the mediating function



24.1 Ethnic groups and movements in Southern Africa between 950 and 1000. (T. N. Huffman)



24.2 Spatial organization of the Bantu cattle culture: the senior household is usually up-slope and behind the men's court and cattle byre, which contains grain storage pits (P) and graves (G). The small circles represent raised grain bins at the back of the individual households. (T. N. Huffman)

of cattle. Cattle belong to the domain of men: they are the principal form of wealth, the main avenue to wives and children, and the basis of success, status and power. Therefore a man's court is placed in the centre of the settlement in or near the cattle byre of the headman. The headman and other important people are buried in this kraal. The huts of a man's wives are placed around this central zone according to a system of status expressed through some alternating use of left and right positions. Attitudes to profane and sacred activities, on the other hand, determine what is found in front and back positions. The front of a household and settlement is allocated to public and profane activities, while the back is reserved for private and sacred activities. Because this sacred/profane dimension is arranged at more-or-less right angles to that concerned primarily with status, the most important person is at the back of the settlement in the most protected position. If the front of the settlement faces down-slope, then status and ritual importance are also expressed through height.

This general pattern applies to many different ethnic groups in Southern Africa, but it is not found among the matrilineal Bantu in Central Africa, who own few if any cattle, nor is it found among the cattle-owning non-Bantu-speakers in East Africa. The pattern instead appears to be restricted to patrilineal Bantu who exchange cattle for wives. The presence of this pattern in the archaeological record is conclusive evidence for a distinctive Bantu system of values concerning politics and cattle.

Using this kind of evidence, the Bantu cattle culture can be traced from historic times directly back to the seventh century in Southern Africa. Diagnostic features of the spatial pattern characterize eighteenth-century stone-walled settlements attributed to northern Transvaal Ndebele, sixteenth- to eighteenth-century stone-walled settlements associated with Sotho-Tswana speakers, fourteenth- to sixteenth-century Moloko (the archaeological name for the Sotho-Tswana ceramic complex) settlements without stone walls, twelfth- to fourteenth-century Woolandale sites, and twelfth- to tenth-century Zhizo settlements, including those with apparently small herds. These diagnostic features show that Zhizo people during the Early Iron Age had the same basic attitudes towards cattle as the historic Nguni. At the same time, research has shown that herding and farming were complementary aspects of one system: separate Early and Late Iron Age types of economy did not exist.

Our understanding of the Bantu cattle culture can be used to interpret the important events and changes that occurred in the Shashi-Limpopo area. The size of a settlement in the Bantu cattle culture is a direct result of political power: the larger the settlement, the more important the leader. The largest and politically most important Zhizo settlement so far discovered anywhere is Schroda, just south-east of the modern border between Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa. The largest known Leopard's Kopje settlement is K2, located about six kilometres south-west of the earlier Zhizo capital.

At one time K2 was thought to be a Khoisan rather than a Bantu settlement. More recent analyses, however, show that the K2 people came from an essentially Negro population, as did other Leopard's Kopje, Eiland and Zhizo communities, including Schroda. This radically different interpretation of Iron Age communities is the result of better comparative collections and better methods of analysis. The skeletal evidence now complements that from ceramic style and settlement organization and shows that K2 and Schroda people were Negroes.

The K2 and Schroda people were probably attracted to the Shashi-Limpopo area because it is a good environment for mixed agriculturalists. In addition, the Mopani woodland between the two rivers is prime elephant country, and ivory would have been easily available; even today this area is rich in elephant. Furthermore, the rivers that drain the western gold reefs of Zimbabwe flow into the Shashi and Limpopo near their confluence, and so it would have been possible to pan for alluvial gold in the vicinity of Schroda and K2.

Trade and politics: 1000-1075

Archaeological evidence for contact between coastal merchants and Iron Age people in the Shashi-Limpopo area is clear. In fact, ninth-century Schroda is the earliest site in Southern Africa to yield a substantial number of glass beads and ivory objects, and K2 has produced more ivory and glass beads than all other contemporaneous settlements combined. What is more, archaeologists in Mozambique have recently located eighth- to twelfth-century coastal trading stations that probably supplied the glass beads first to Schroda and then to K2.

Reconnaissance of the coastal plain around Vilanculos Bay and the Bazaruto archipelago discovered sites with Persian pottery and Islamic glass. Preliminary excavations at one of these sites, Chibuene, uncovered an eighth- to ninth-century deposit that contained glazed and unglazed wares like those from early periods of Kilwa and Manda. This Early Iron Age deposit also yielded several hundred yellow, green and blue glass beads like those from Schroda and K2. The Vilanculos area thus appears to have had the earliest coastal trading stations in south-east Africa and the Shashi-Limpopo area appears to have been one of the first in the interior of Southern Africa to be integrated in the Indian Ocean commercial network.

We know from other sources that glass beads, cloth and sometimes glazed ceramics were brought to Southern Africa from China and the Middle East in exchange for gold and ivory. Significantly, these imported commodities were different from the traditional wealth in cattle in at least one way.

In traditional Zhizo and Leopard's Kopje economies cattle had to be constantly circulated to maintain the system. Wealthy men would have loaned their cattle to poor people, and rich and poor alike would have exchanged cattle for wives. Traditional wealth, therefore, could not be hoarded without destroying the system. In contrast to cattle, the distribution of gold, ivory, glass beads and cloth could be completely controlled without undermining the economy because these commodities were storable. Since the trade goods were imported in huge quantities, hereditary leaders could become exceedingly wealthy. Wealth and political power were linked in the traditional system because, among other reasons, the more marriages and loans a chief could make, the more alliances and allegiances he established. According to later Portuguese documents, some of the trade goods were used for bride wealth, and hence, once these commodities were translated into traditional economic values, trade wealth also furthered political power.

When the Leopard's Kopje people moved into the Shashi-Limpopo area, they probably took the ivory trade away from Schroda before the trade wealth could have

much impact on Zhizo society. A dramatic increase in the political power of the leaders at K2, however, is reflected in the changes of the spatial organization. Originally K2 was organized like Schroda: small homesteads with their cattle byres flanking the central court of the chief. By 1020, however, the court midden at K2 became so large that it engulfed the nearby byre. At about the same time the cattle were moved out of the central area. This removal of the central byre was the first alteration in the spatial organization of the Bantu cattle culture, and it was a direct consequence of increased political activity and associated changes in the relative economic value of cattle.

By 1075 the raised valley in which K2 was situated was completely occupied. Recent excavations and radio-carbon dates show that the abrupt abandonment of K2 at this time coincided with an instantaneous increase of K2 people around Mapungubwe Hill, less than a kilometre away. Since more living-space was available at Mapungubwe, it is reasonable to presume that the capital was shifted there in order to accommodate a growing population. A natural amphitheatre at the bottom of Mapungubwe Hill probably sheltered the new court because this is the only sizeable area inside the town centre free of residential debris. The absence of cattle dung anywhere in the vicinity indicates that a byre was not erected with the court, and thus the previous alteration in the spatial pattern at K2 was perpetuated at Mapungubwe. Subsequent spatial transformations show that the origins of the Zimbabwe culture lay here rather than at Great Zimbabwe itself.

Mapungubwe, the first Zimbabwe capital: 1075–1220

The spatial organization of the Zimbabwe culture differs in several ways from the Bantu cattle culture pattern: the king lived inside a stone enclosure on a hill above the court, not at the base of the hill; élite were buried in hills rather than in the byre; royal wives lived in their own area rather than with the king; and important men maintained prestigious residences on the outskirts of the capital. These and other features occurred for the first time at Mapungubwe.

When the capital was relocated at Mapungubwe, the chief and his household moved on to the hill above the court. This shift from up-slope to up on a hill is the first time in the prehistory of Southern Africa that leaders were so physically separated from their followers, and it is the first indication of an institutionalized class structure.

Shortly after the move from K2 to Mapungubwe, the K2 ceramic style began to change. Some might argue that this change signalled the appearance of a new people but it may have been due to the emergence of full-time ceramic specialists, who were a consequence of the burgeoning population and developing class structure.

Other artefacts indicate continued contact with coastal traders. Spindle-whorls appear in about 1100 at Mapungubwe. Since cotton-weaving was a well-established craft in Swahili towns by this time, the spindle-whorls at Mapungubwe, the earliest known in the interior, mark the introduction of weaving by coastal traders and perhaps the start of another craft speciality.

At the beginning of the trade, gold was probably more a means to wealth than wealth itself, but by about 1150 gold objects had been locally manufactured. Unique items such as a rhinoceros and a 'sceptre' made from thin sheets of gold tacked on to wooden

cores were found in élite burials on the royal hill. This is the first time in Southern Africa that gold was used as a status symbol, and is therefore the earliest evidence that gold had acquired a local intrinsic value.

By this time, the spatial organization of Mapungubwe had been transformed into a new pattern in which stone walls demarcated important areas. One stone-walled residence was sited next to the court at the base of the hill. This residence was most probably occupied by the principal councillor, the man in the Zimbabwe culture who organized court cases and appointments with the king. The main staircase led from this area through a narrow cleft to the hilltop: paired sockets in the sandstone probably held wooden steps, and a short length of coursed walling marked the top of the passage. More sockets at the top may have supported a palisade fence which surrounded the hill and funnelled traffic to the right of the graveyard. On this right-hand side several huts had been erected in front of a large arc of stone walling that enclosed a special hut complex. Rare Chinese celadon from this complex, together with the stone wall, indicate that the king lived here. The huts on the other side have yielded the only grindstones from the hilltop, and hence were probably occupied by royal wives. Therefore, the new pattern included a formal distinction between the wives' residence and that of the king and his retainers.

The distribution of occupational debris shows that the bulk of the population resided within the western wall, but a few families lived on high spots outside the urban centre. In the Bantu cattle culture pattern men who were competitors for chieftainship, such as brothers, uncles and important affines, usually lived outside the protective circle formed by the chief's immediate supporters. Because the same kind of competition would have existed at Mapungubwe, it is likely that the prestigious residences around the edge of the town were inhabited by such important men.

These important residences are similar to élite hilltop settlements some distance away from Mapungubwe: for example, Little Muck, 13 km away; Mmangwa, 40 km to the west; Mapela Hill, 85 km north-west; and Macena Hill, 96 km north-east. These different kinds of settlements provide the best archaeological evidence for a three-tiered political hierarchy: the low-lying sites were probably inhabited by commoners; the small hilltop sites were probably occupied by district leaders; and the capital at Mapungubwe would have been the supreme authority. The élite residences on the outskirts of the capital, then, were probably the town houses of these district leaders. Thus, the class structure of Mapungubwe society is evident in the regional distribution of settlements as well as in the spatial organization of the capital.

The sequence of changes from K2 to Mapungubwe and the similarities between Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe demonstrate that the Zimbabwe culture evolved out of the Bantu cattle culture in the Shashi-Limpopo area. Mapungubwe, consequently, should be considered as the first Zimbabwe capital.

This sequence also clarifies the roles of religion and cattle in the evolution of the Zimbabwe culture. Some historians believe that the Mbire moved south across the Zambezi and developed the Zimbabwe kingdom through the power of their religion before the gold trade was established with the coast. The archaeological evidence is clear, however, that the important ethnic movement was from the south and that the elaborate ritual which surrounded Zimbabwe kings accompanied, rather than preceded,

the external trade and growth of political power. Therefore, new religious forces could not have caused the rise of the Zimbabwe culture.

Other Africanists believe that the Zimbabwe culture arose through the ownership of cattle herds and grazing strategy for these large areas. As herds naturally increased, it is argued, concepts of private property developed around cattle. Since the best grazing strategy for these large herds was a transhumance cycle, according to this hypothesis, control of distant pasturages became essential and this forced the development of centralized political authority. The first objection to this interpretation is that cattle herds did not dramatically increase immediately before the development of the Zimbabwe culture, for the thick dung deposits and spatial organization of the seventh-century Zhizo settlements show that cattle-oriented societies existed at least four hundred years before Mapungubwe was established. My second objection concerns the postulated transhumance cycle. The numerous commoner sites with substantial dung deposits in the Mapungubwe region negate the possibility of any regular, large-scale movement of cattle and people to distant pasturages, for the physical remains show that these settlements were just as permanent as Early Iron Age communities.

More important than these substantive errors, however, is the confusion between political centralization and cultural change. Various cattle-based societies within Southern Africa have been highly centralized, such as the Bamangwato, Matabele, Zulu and Swazi, and yet these societies still had the same cultural values as the rest of the Southern Bantu, and, accordingly, their settlements were still organized according to the same principles that underlay K2 and Schroda. It follows then that private wealth in cattle may have been a necessary precursor to the evolution of Zimbabwe, but it was not a sufficient cause.

Thus, neither the cattle nor the religious hypothesis explains the present data. The complete trade hypothesis, on the other hand, accounts for the long period of cattle-keeping before the rise of Mapungubwe, the enlarged court midden at K2, the move from K2 to Mapungubwe, the subsequent spatial alterations at Mapungubwe, and the continuity of the Bantu cattle culture in other parts of Southern Africa. As this chapter has shown, the transformations at K2 and Mapungubwe that led to the Zimbabwe culture were the result of increased political power made possible by the ivory and gold trade.

The history of Madagascar before +1000, sometimes even before +1500, is often seen as an area of uncertainty in which numerous and contradictory hypotheses have been put forward for decades without ever being able to secure general agreement. The written sources brought to light on the island at best go back to the twelfth century, and the growth of archaeology has been too recent to provide us with reliable results which would place historical reconstruction on a reliable base. The use of non-Malagasy sources has been, since the old publications of G. Ferrand, virtually limited to works in the Arabic language.

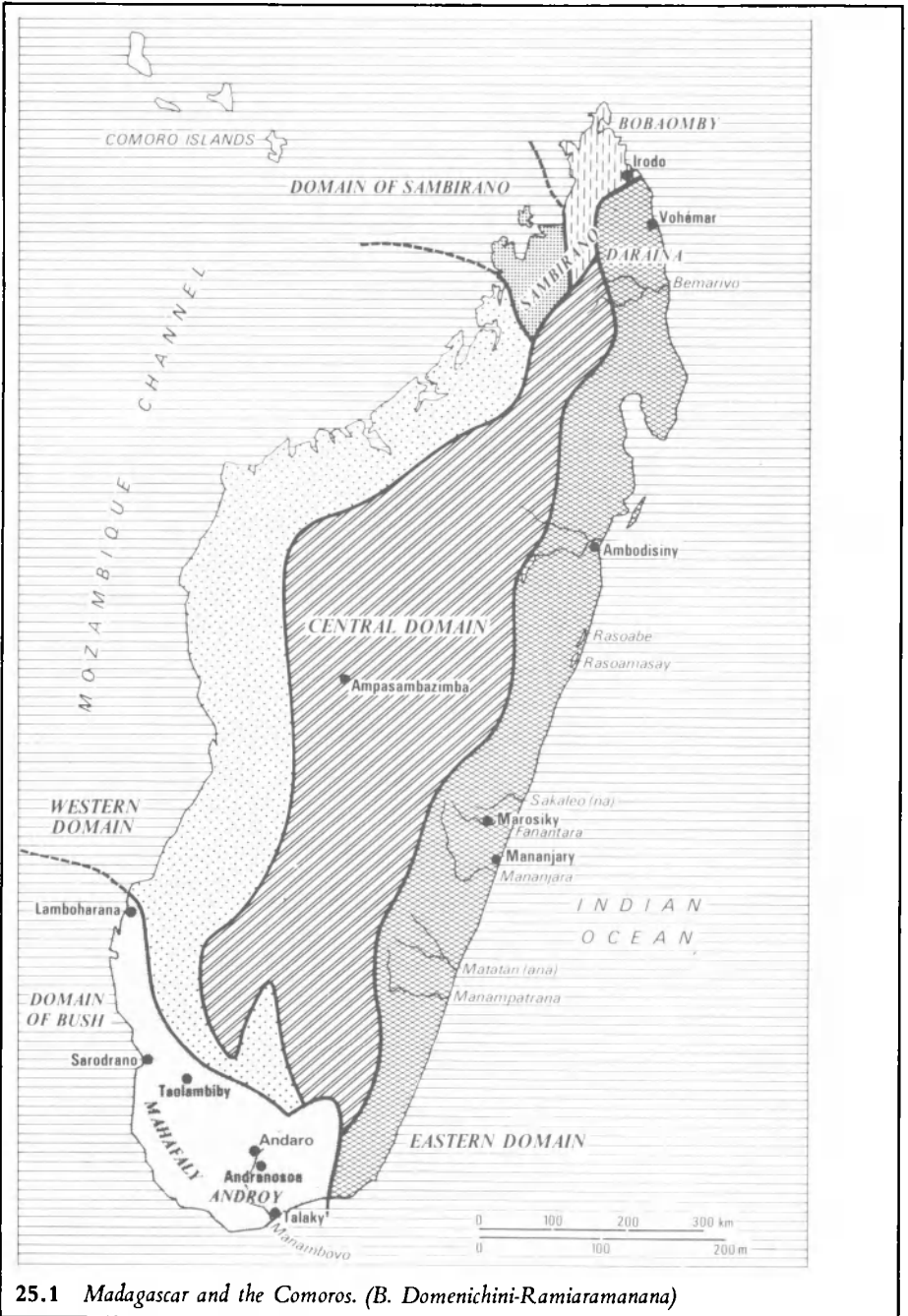
Therefore we have attempted to use oral sources in all the forms in which they can be found today in Madagascar. They have survived in a variety of circumstances – sometimes, especially in the south-east, they have been incorporated into documents written in Arabic-Malagasy script (*Volan' Onjatsy* or *sorabe*); sometimes they have been absorbed, in the form of traces that are difficult to interpret, in sources that have been much reworked, while in others, they are used in rituals still performed; and lastly they are scattered in sources where the context is not very clear.

Like everywhere else, these sources demand a precise methodology: in the case of Madagascar, linguistics play a very important role in opening up the historical information contained in these oral sources. The profound homogeneity of the Malagasy language, which derives from the unity of its underlying Austronesian foundation, makes it possible not only to identify borrowings from other languages rather easily and locate them chronologically in the cultural history of the country, but also to work on any tradition transmitted in Malagasy.

The corpus of 'giants' legends as a source

There exists a whole corpus of very scattered information about 'giants', among whom the most important bear names such as Darafify, Darofipy and Darafely Fatrapaitañ (ana). The most complete and coherent version of the legend of Darafify is contained in the *sorabe* manuscript preserved at Oslo and edited in 1982 by Ludwig Munthe. Analysis of it enables us to uncover some of the political and social circumstances under which it was transmitted and to draw from it valuable historical information.

The first clear information is provided by the names of the 'giants' in question; these



25.1 Madagascar and the Comoros. (B. Domenichini-Ramiaramanana)

names are made up of a mixture of words of Austronesian, Sanskrit or Persian origin, and they all relate to the trade in spices, perfumes and medicinal herbs. They refer thus to a period of contacts between Madagascar and some Indian Ocean regions before Islam, and suggest the hypothesis that the eastern and south-eastern parts of the island had participated in trade in the Indian Ocean prior to the seventh century.

Darafify, Darofipy and Darafely Fatrapaitañ (ana) are formed from simple words still used in Malagasy and we need to look at how they are used. *Fi/m/py/fify* relate to food, cosmetic and pharmaceutical products; this last category of products included, on the one hand, animal products coming mainly from the operculum of *Murex* and especially of the *Murex trunculus*, which are still used in powder form in the south-west, and, on the other hand, vegetable products derived essentially from certain Myristicaceae (the bark and gum of *Haematodendron* or *Mauloutchia* sp.), but probably also from the root of a herbaceous plant. Also in the category of *fi/m/py/fify* were the various varieties of wild pepper (*Piper borbonese* DC), currently known as 'pink pepper' (*Piper pachyphyllum* and *Piper pyrifolium* Vahl). Finally, there was benjamin (*Jatra* or *Styrax benzoin* Dryander) remembered in the name of the giant Fatrapaitañ (ana), but which seems not to have then been the main export product of south-eastern Madagascar, since it appears through this name that a measure of benjamin (*fatra*) was a gift made to the purchaser when a sale was concluded (*paitanana*). The main product must have been *fimpy*, which botanists have recognized as being abundant in the south-east.

There are other products, too, which appear in the sources of the 'Darafify Cycle', but their names were not used, as the preceding ones were, to make up the names of giants. To give them their proper names, the (*ha*) *ramy* (*Canarium madagascariense*, *C. boivini* and *C. multiflorum* Engler) are known today as 'Madagascar incense' or 'white African incense'.

Linguistics does show then that there is a conscious link between the names of 'legendary' figures who incarnate a very abstract ancient history and the plants and precious products of Madagascar, especially in the eastern part of the island. We need to know whether these indirect allusions have any real historical content, and whether it might be possible to situate them in even a relative chronology; and whether this chronology in turn fits into a reliable chronology of trade in the Indian Ocean. On the other hand, we need to elicit, still within a likely chronology, the history of the power relationships among groups in ancient periods on the island.

The names which have just been mentioned are, historically, difficult to use. Each of them constitutes a collective symbol and not the individual name of a 'historic hero'; when one speaks of the 'Darafify', 'the Darofipy' and others, one is simply talking of a number of episodes in the history of the island which probably predate the eleventh century. But it also describes a *given group at a given time in its history*, for example, when it attempted to corner the production and export of certain products. At other times, or on other occasions, the same group was perhaps known by other names.

It is probably impossible to conclude too rapidly, straightaway, on the basis of the few undeniably historical features that can certainly be found in the 'Darafify cycle' and which relate to the internal history of the island, that a history of Madagascar can be written based on them. They constitute irreplaceable building elements. But who were these 'Darafify', who came from the north-east, and who are said, at a time which it

is difficult to specify, to have sought to escape from their traditional state as cattle-rearers, which the oral sources stress was theirs? They are said then to have become involved, voluntarily or by force, depending on places and cases, in a trade (how regular? On what scale?) which may have carried (using Austronesian (?) or Persian (?) middlemen) products from the east coast of Madagascar in demand in the world to the north.

The space within which the powerful group of the Darafify, tempted to acquire a monopoly of this trade, intervened is more narrowly defined not only by the places where the recorded events occurred, but also by the places where the human achievements attributed to them are still to be found, almost all of which are connected with the working of chlorite-schist (quarries and manufactured goods). This space, although it had an extension into the Mahafale in the south-west, stretched essentially from the extreme north of the island to the basin of the Matataña (na). The whole eastern seaboard of the island, which is moreover particularly rich in aromatics, spices, perfumes and medicinal herbs, and the conditions under which they were exploited (production and marketing) also emerge quite clearly from the deciphering of proper names.

Archaeology

The present-day vegetation of Madagascar is generally considered to be the direct or indirect result of human activity. The disappearance, about the beginning of the present millennium, of some animals (large lemurs, large 'ostriches' or *Aepyornis*, large land tortoises, giant crocodiles, dwarf hippopotamuses, etc.) seems to indicate that there had already been a considerable change in the forest cover. It may moreover be noted that, in some sites dating from our period (Lamboharana, $+730 \pm 80$; Taolambiby, $+900 \pm 150$; and Ambasambazimba, $+915 \pm 50$), traces of human industries are found associated with the remains of these sub-fossil animals.

The planting of valuable species and the acclimatization of new plants were no doubt undertaken before the destruction of the forest by silviculturists or at least by true wandering land-clearers, who were generally careful about restoring the soil and the plant formations. Archaeological research has so far brought to light only one site predating our period (Saradrano, a fishermen's site in the south-west, $+490 \pm 90$), but it has on the other hand revealed some that do date to our period. These sites have confirmed some of the facts recently established by the decoding of oral tradition, which, in turn, should make it possible to propose a better-based interpretation of the results of surveys and excavations.

In the northern region, which tradition points to as being the place of origin of the Darafify, between Bobaomy and Daraina, at the bottom of a bay, is to be found Irodo, from the name of a present-day village on the river that empties into this bay. Since there has been no pollen analysis, there is nothing yet to confirm or rule out the exploitation there of the *dara* and other commercial plants remembered here in the name Daraina ('from which *dara* were made'/'where the *dara* are plentiful').

The three coastal sites that have been the object of surveys have revealed a population with the same culture, characterized, according to Vérin, by 'the styles of its pottery

(pots, jars, legged bowls), the use of chlorite-schist (pots, bowls) and the consumption of *Pyrazus palustris*. This site, which was in use at least until the middle of the fifteenth century, was already in use in the ninth and perhaps even in the eighth century. In those early times, fishermen knew how to work iron and glass and were in contact with an Arab-Persian trading area. Among the shells (*Pyrazus palustris*, *Ostrea mytoloides*, *Turbo*, etc.), no doubt mainly destined for consumption and craftwork (spoons carved from *Turbo*), are found, although in small quantities, *Murex* which provided *fimpy*, a perfume still sought today by Muslim 'Indians' in Madagascar and whose name is to be found, as we have seen, in the name of Darafify.

Other sites dating at least partly from our period are to be found in the far south of the island, in present-day Antandroy country. These are essentially two groups, both situated on the banks of the Manambovo, that of the site of Talaky, astride the mouth, and that of the site of Andranosoa, partly occupied by the imposing Manda (n-d)-Refilahatra, at the confluence of the Manambovo with the River Andranosoa. To these two groups can be added up-river that of the site of Andoro, composed of Mahirane and Ambonifanane, a group that has not been given an absolute date, but which clearly belongs to the same culture, with (inter) fluvial sites and stone forts, as Manda (n-d)-Refilahatra-Andranosoa and goes back to a period when, in inhabited places, the various species of sub-fossil fauna could still be found.

Like the written sources, the oral sources, including the Darafify cycle, are silent about these sites, whose populations have disappeared without leaving any trace in the region and whose present-day inhabitants know nothing whatsoever about their distant predecessors. The radio-carbon datings indicate a period from +940 to +1310 as the extreme limits, with a greater likelihood for the eleventh century.

Even though the south was perhaps already at this time affected by the beginnings of drought, it certainly had different climatic conditions in the tenth-eleventh centuries. The wooded region made it possible to engage in an economic life that rested in part on metal-working involving copper and iron, and ores of these metals have been found, but, unlike the copper ore around Bemarivo in the north, so have traces of ancient exploitation. However, copper, which was to enjoy great fortune in later periods, only gave rise to the production of *vangovango* bracelets with a broken ring, which have been found as far away as Irodo and are still called, even when they are made of silver, by the name *haba*. Once again, the linguistic associations are interesting. The Cham *haban* and the Čuru *saban* both mean copper in the continental Austronesian domain; *saba* in both Malagasy and in Comorian is still the usual word for copper today. In Kiswahili *shaba* means copper.

Iron was exploited in the true sense of the word. Here, the metal does not seem to have been worked on the spot, since the usual practice of re-use, attested to by ethnography, is not enough to explain the striking contrast between the abundance of traces of exploitation of the ore (ashes, coal, slag) and the virtual absence of iron objects, the sites of the period having yielded only one bracelet (Andranosoa), a harpoon and fish-hooks (Talaky). To this might be added – in a country where the existence of stone tools has not yet been attested – marks of axes and knives on bones (Andaro, Andranosoa). No doubt the smelted products were largely exported through Talaky, whose development, if not foundation, thus appears to be linked to its role as outlet

to the sea of export products from the interior, which, moreover, were apparently not limited to smelted products.

The discovery of numerous bone remains of young animals at Andaro suggests that young animals were consumed there in large quantities. This had less to do with the gastronomic tastes of the inhabitants than with the need to slaughter the animals before their skin (*daro*) was too spoiled by brambles and thorns. Sheepskins may have been a second export product. And it may well be that the large surplus of meat that was obtained was salted and smoked, using the preservation techniques known to have existed at the time. This preserved meat could naturally have been a third export product. But, if the maritime traffic was heavy, this meat probably served mostly to supply the boats. Nor is it impossible that some of it was destined for local consumption.

In addition to sheep, they also reared – but in smaller numbers, it would seem – oxen and goats, whose consumption is attested by the left-overs from meals, which also show the consumption of products of hunting (bones of birds, hedgehogs and small rodents) and fishing (fish bones, crab claws, shells of sea urchins, fresh- and sea-water shellfish). As for their food plants, which are not mentioned in the historical tradition and for which there is no archaeological evidence, no doubt they at least included those among the earliest plants domesticated on the island that were already present in the region, such as yams and taros or similar plants, which could also be gathered in the forest, as they still are today.

The tiny part of Talaky that has been explored, on the east bank, has only revealed one fishermen's dwelling; its everyday objects are rather simple utilitarian pieces and cannot bear comparison with those from sites in the interior. The local pottery bears traces of graphitizing with no apparent utilitarian purpose like that which has, it seems, been found outside Madagascar (ancient as well as contemporary pottery) only on certain pieces of pottery from East Africa (Lelesu tradition) and Southern Africa (Gokomere-Ziwa-Zhizo tradition), on the one hand, and those in the Sa-huynh-Kalanay tradition (especially in ancient Champa), in the Austronesian area, on the other hand. And the presence on the sites along the upper reaches of the Manambovo of chlorite-schist weights and pottery imitating stone models, sea products and overseas products (sgraffito from Arabia and other imported pottery not yet precisely dated, ivory pendants from Africa or Asia) is final proof that Talaky, through which it must all have transited, was not a site of fishermen of the Sarodrano type. The fact that it covers such a large area would itself suggest large-scale fishing whose produce must have been in part preserved and sold like the mutton. However, all this still requires confirmation.

Further research, systematically directed towards the study of river mouth sites and, upstream, of economically strategic zones on the sides of the basins, would no doubt make it possible to proceed to a reconstruction of the economic and social life of the whole of Madagascar at this key period in its ecological and political history. The data from archaeology, in their present state, combined with the data from ethnography and tradition, already suggest the existence of a remarkable cultural and material unity, which is reflected both in the still living conceptions in present-day Malagasy civilization and in the features of the material culture dated from this period. Some

of these – notably the imported pottery – prove clearly that some Malagasy groups were part of a network of relations that reached out into areas which the study of traditions had not previously brought out, such as the countries bordering the South China Sea, on the one hand, and the countries bordering the Mozambique Channel on the other. This must naturally entail extending to these 'new' areas the search for data that might throw light on the history of Madagascar.

Madagascar in the international context

From the elaborate data of tradition to the more direct data provided by archaeology, the area of Madagascar has thus already provided, for our period, various indications of relations with a wide area overseas, some points in which are barely mentioned, while others are stressed. But given the present gaps in this documentation, nothing can be deduced from it immediately either as to the true nature of the relations between the island and each of these points, or as to their intensity. The indications provided by the study of the oral sources and by archaeology make it possible to discard, at last, the hypothesis of the short chronology, which placed the peopling of Madagascar at the end of the first millennium. There is no longer any doubt that man was present in Madagascar, at least in the regions on which recent surveys have thrown new light, long before +1000. The period from the seventh to the eleventh centuries, despite what is still obscure about it, must no longer be accepted, in Malagasy history, as the time when peopling began. The time has come to abandon, once and for all as far as concerns Malagasy history, all discussion arising out of the inadequacy of our knowledge about the world of Austronesia. Indeed, the island appears to have been situated in a broad oceanic context.

The history of navigation in the Indian Ocean remains to be written; for the present, there are only partial studies and it is difficult to build a wholly reliable synthesis out of these. The maritime expansion of the Arab-Muslim world from the eleventh century onwards has probably overshadowed the part played by other peoples and other regions in the earliest navigations. More attention needs to be paid to the degree of improvement reached, by the first century of the Christian era, by the sailing techniques of those whom the Chinese in the first millennium embraced under the name *Kun-lun*, among whom the Austronesians were probably a majority or in any event very numerous. These Austronesians were the first to be recognized as being the builders of the great sewn boats intended for sailing the high seas, which the Chinese authors from the third to the ninth centuries called by the name of *kun-lun bo*, describing them as ships with woven sails averaging 50 metres long and capable of transporting between 500 and 1,000 people and a cargo of between 250 and 1,000 tons. Although rafts and canoes with outriggers may perhaps have continued to transport some Austronesian immigrants to Madagascar at the end of the first millennium, it is no longer possible, for periods after the third century and perhaps even before this time, to tie the date of the peopling of the island to the sailing capacities of those 'frail skiffs'.

If it is agreed that the Austronesians were the first to sail towards Madagascar (whose peopling, language and culture bear their imprint – on this point no doubt has emerged during recent research), there are good grounds for examining the hypothesis that the

island was integrated into an inter-regional trade pattern, which generated a demand for a number of valuable products. Timber, caulking gum, aromatics and spices were, from a very early date, supplied by gathering techniques in the island; especially cinnamon, which seems to have been one of the most profitable products whose exploitation by protected gathering techniques was a speciality of ancient Champa.

This hypothesis clashes, of course, with many received ideas and contains features that are still very fragile alongside others that have been clearly established. It rests first on the likely participation of Austronesians in the transport of persons and goods in the western Indian Ocean at the beginning of the first millennium. Various pieces of evidence suggest the possible presence of the 'vessels of black men', *kun-lun-bo*, close to Africa – the reference in the *Periplus* to sewn boats with woven sails on the northern coast of Azania and the sewn boats with a single rudder that probably belonged to the Chams, who were present in the Red Sea in the sixth century. The cultivation of banana trees from south-east Asia in East Africa, the export of coconut-oil through Rhapta at the time of the *Periplus*, the presence of war elephants ridden by Seres in the 'Ethiopian' army before the third century, the participation of seafaring Cham traders in the Zandj slave-trade both to Asia and to the Middle East, and the acute awareness of the unity and weight of the black world attributed to the Zandj by al-Djāhiz are so many factors, among others, that testify to the antiquity and durability of contacts.

The second series of factors relates to the part played by Madagascar in this possible movement of Austronesian boats westward. Miller puts the integration of the island into this trade at a very early date; it seems to us, given the evidence found in the oral sources and archaeology, that Madagascar was not only, as Miller believed, a screen serving to maintain commercial secrecy about the land of cinnamon and cassia, which was misleadingly placed in the Horn of Africa. The east coast of Madagascar was a country still rich in a number of the main products in the international trade of antiquity and the high Middle Ages and had, in addition, the advantage of being close to the principal outlets, and particularly to the African ports contributing to supplying Egypt, and through it the Mediterranean world. We have no doubt that the east coast of Madagascar supplied its products during the period covered here. The absence of certain plants of great cultural importance, such as *Calophyllum inophyllum*, on the coast of Africa, even inclines us to believe that Madagascar, where this plant is present, was visited earlier by the Austronesians than was East Africa.

All that we have said above concerns, of course, the period preceding that dealt with in this volume. Since we believe that at this remote time Madagascar was participating heavily in the Indian Ocean trade, the next step is to attempt to follow the stages in this participation between the seventh and eleventh centuries.

Thanks to the conquest of South Arabia (in 570), Sassanid Persia succeeded in partially taking over the legacy of the South Arabians in the sea trade in the Indian Ocean, including the Red Sea. In the next century Persia was to some extent integrated into the expansionist policy of the Arab-Islamic world, whose conquest of Egypt (641–2) completed the seizure of control of the trade routes in the west by the Arabs and Persians.

The initial adaptation of Madagascar to this changed situation consisted manifestly

in entering into relations with Persian-speaking importers, which explains how their influence is perceptible through the data yielded by the soil of Madagascar. But the partial change in partners and the interruption of overland routes, which lay behind not only the decline in the incense trade but also no doubt that in other products coming up against competition with those of the Arab-Persian world, also perhaps impeded the trade in cinnamon, which was already in competition with Ceylon. And, when, at the end of the seventh century and the beginning of the eighth century, the people of al-Ḳumr (Comoros and Madagascar) embarked on the conquest of Aden on their outrigger boats, we should perhaps see it as a partially successful attempt to restore the situation. Some of them had made Aden their home port, from where they would set out each season, 'sail together in a single monsoon', and had succeeded in establishing a direct sailing route between their country of origin and South Arabia. Thus, in spite of everything, they were able to compete with their rivals, since the Arab and Persian seafarers, who seem not to have known of the Comoros and Madagascar until the tenth century – and only had a clear idea of them by the twelfth century – continued to receive Malagasy products on the East African coast, along which they would sail.

It is difficult to be clear about the detailed situation of trade during the ninth century. In this century and those immediately following, the voyages of the 'Malagasy' seafarers probably usually ended at Aden. Their long familiarity with Muslim countries led to the conversion of some Malagasy to Islam, and it may even be wondered whether some voyages from al-Ḳumr to Aden and the entrance to the Persian Gulf did not eventually become part of the organization of Arab-Persian trade. Malagasy seafarers converted to Islam initiated the sailors of Oman and Sīrāf in the direct sailing route to the north of Madagascar, where the earliest settlements can still be found at Onjatsy, and also to the island of Ḳanbalū. It was at the latest by the beginning of the tenth century that the rivalry with the Arabs and Persians was no longer experienced so intensely by all Malagasy. This happened precisely at the time when, taking advantage of the situation created by the massacre of Muslims in Canton (878) and the growth of the power of Śrīvijāya, the world of the *Kun-lun*, through control of the straits, had just gained a real advantage over rival navies (Arab-Persian and Indian, on the one hand, and Chinese on the other).

This control of the straits succeeded in making the Malacca peninsula, in the kingdom of Śrīvijāya, the terminus for all ships going to or coming from China. For China had become one of the largest markets of the time, and much of the trade of all the countries in the south-west of the Indian Ocean cut off from the Mediterranean had turned towards it. Madagascar, of which at least the eastern part continued to be part of the *Kun-lun* orbit, naturally participated in this trade. In the episode of the attack of Ḳanbalū (945), it is sometimes accepted that the attackers called Wāk-Wāk by the Arabic sources came from Madagascar. The explanation for this raid given by Ibn Lākīs in *The Marvels of India* is accepted as satisfactory; the expedition was looking for Zandj to take into slavery and products suitable for their country and for China (ivory, tortoiseshell, leopard skins and ambergris).

However, although piracy and raiding were common throughout this period, the expedition consisting of a 'thousand vessels' that had come from the south to attack

Kanbalū was not only led by Malagasy from the east coast. It also included Wāk-Wāk from the Far East, whose expeditions in these regions in the far south could not have been motivated by the quest for products which they could leave to their allies in Madagascar to take care of and which were plentiful in their own regions and were the objects of their centuries-old trade with China. Everything suggests that what was important for these *Kun-lun* or Wāk-Wāk was to oppose the Muslim southward advance (supported by the Islamized Malagasy) and to protect access to the mines of gold and other metals. Perhaps it can be accepted that the iron in southern Madagascar, which was so well protected by those who were exploiting it, might in itself constitute a resource that it was fighting for in order to preserve the monopoly.

Expeditions such as that of 945 seem to have slowed down the advance of the Muslim navy for a long time. However, the homogeneity of the *Kun-lun* world had already been affected by the proselytism of Islam. It may have been at this time that migrations such as that of the Zafi (n-d)-Raminiā left the shores of the Red Sea. At the same time, the island began to develop its relations with East Africa – which may well have been different but which was also Islamized – probably exporting there chlorite-schist objects that it produced, as the imports of Kilwa from the tenth century onwards would tend to suggest.

This new assessment of economic and maritime relations between Madagascar and the *Kun-lun* world, on the one hand, and between the island and the Arab-Persian world, on the other, raises new questions relating to the internal life of the island. The concordant observations, six centuries apart, of the *Hudūd al-‘Ālam* (tenth century) and Admiral Sīdī ‘Alī Ālebi (sixteenth century) seem to show that the old political and social structures in the south firmly resisted new influences. This should prompt historians to re-examine the question of ‘Arab influence’, which has tended to be over-worked in the bid to explain various features of ancient Malagasy culture. However, such an examination relates rather to a study of periods after the eleventh century. The major changes in perspective required should be the outcome of bringing together all the sources currently available in order to write the history of the period from the seventh to the eleventh centuries; there is much to think about, when the many gaps still existing in the documentation for the period and the extent of our ignorance of the earlier period are borne in mind. The essential point, in the immediate future, perhaps lies less in recognizing that this period was an important turning-point in the past of the island and in accepting the facts that appear to have been historically or virtually ascertained, than in having ‘experimentally’ established the hitherto seldom acknowledged equal importance of the various categories of sources, and the need to exploit all of them in an equally systematic manner.



The African diaspora in Asia

Preliminary remarks

Although the presence of Africans outside their continent has been attested since antiquity, it was only during the period under review that their role in the various fields of human activity in the Muslim countries of the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, the Malay Archipelago and the Far East became increasingly important. Our sources on these activities are unfortunately still scanty and widely dispersed in many works and documents, written in various, mostly oriental, languages. Moreover, no systematic scholarly study has ever been made on the African diaspora in Asia. This chapter is therefore a preliminary attempt to bring together the available data on early relations between Africa and Arabia, as well as on the political, social, economic and cultural aspects of the African presence in the aforementioned areas.

Blacks in pre-Islamic Arabia

The geographical proximity of Arabia to Africa and the centuries-old links across the Red Sea led to the early presence of many Africans on the Arabian Peninsula. These Africans of both sexes, of various origins but mostly from Ethiopia, Somalia, Nubia and the East Coast, came there in various capacities, but mostly as slaves. On the other hand, a great number of Ethiopian warriors must have remained in South Arabia after its conquest in the sixth century¹ and were absorbed in due course by the predominantly Arab population.

Arabic sources have preserved scattered accounts about people of African origin living in Arabia before the advent of Islam.

Several poets of the pre-Islamic era (*Djāhiliya*) were known collectively as the *Aghribat al-'Arab* (The Crows of the Arabs) because of their swarthy complexion inherited from their mothers. The most famous among these were 'Antara b. *Shaddād*, *Khufāf* ibn *Nadba* and *Sulayk* b. *al-Sulāka*. The latter belonged to the *sa'ālik* - celebrated wandering bands of 'robber-knights', who were famed for their chivalry and honour, despite their predatory activities. However, the most illustrious

1. See Chapter 16 of Volume II.

was 'Antara (or 'Antar) of the *ḵabīla* of 'Abs, born of an Abyssinian bondmaid named Zabība.

He distinguished himself by his valour and strength, thereby gaining glory for his kinsmen. Eventually, he was freed and became an honoured member of his *ḵabīla*. His verses on his numerous battles and vicissitudes and his love-affairs are considered the finest creations of the 'Djāhiliya poetry and assured him of immortal fame. His exploits became in later Islamic times the theme of a popular cycle of romances entitled *Sirat 'Antar* (The Story of 'Antara). He emerged as the national hero of the Arabs.

In the merchant city of Mecca the defence and protection of its caravan routes was entrusted to a troop of mercenaries, known as the *Aḵābīsh*, a term held to be connected with the Arab name for Ethiopians – *al-Ḥabāsh*. Although it seems that the Ethiopians formed the core of this troop, it also consisted of other African slaves and Arab nomads. Their leading role as the main armed force of the city is well attested in many Arabic sources, where the military skill, discipline and prowess of these African 'soldiers of fortune' are repeatedly stressed.

Blacks in Muḥammad's entourage

Tradition has it that among the first converts to Islam in Mecca were a large number of slaves, some of them of African origin. In the tenets of the religion preached by Muḥammad, these socially handicapped people had found the possibility of attaining human dignity and self-respect, and of joining a new community where man was judged primarily by his religious fervour and his pious acts, and not merely by his social or racial origins.

One such early convert was 'Ammār ibn Yāsir, whose mother Sumayya was a former black slave; he participated in the first migrations to Ethiopia and later took part in all the campaigns of the Prophet. The Caliph 'Umar (634–43) appointed him governor of Kufa, one of the most important posts in the new administration of the early Islamic state. He also belonged to the transmitters of the *ḥadīths* (the accounts of Muḥammad's deeds and sayings).

The most celebrated of the Prophet's early circle of black companions was Bilāl b. Rabāḥ, an Ethiopian slave. Before Caliph Abū Bakr bought and freed him, he was persecuted and tortured by his owner because of his religious convictions. He became the first *mu'adhdhin* (one who calls to prayer) in Islam and took part in all the early Islamic campaigns, including those in Syria, where he died of plague in Damascus in 640.

Another early black convert to Islam who made valuable contributions in the military field was al-Miqdād b. 'Amr al-Aswad. He was one of the earliest of Muḥammad's companions and assisted the Prophet in all his battles. Being the only Muslim who fought on horseback during the battle of Badr, he was given the title *Fāris al-Islam* (the knight of Islam). Slaves who embraced Islam were manumitted, thereby becoming *mawālī* (clients) of the Prophet and other prominent Muslims.

In the midst of the early Muslim community were to be found several emancipated black female slaves, such as Umm Ayman Baraka, who nursed the Prophet in his childhood and was a respected member of his household; Fudda, the maid in the employ

of the Prophet's daughter, and Naba'a, a slave girl of Muḥammad's uncle Abū Ṭālib, who is credited with having transmitted a *ḥadīth* on Muḥammad's nocturnal journey (*isrā'a*) to Jerusalem.

Five years after the proclamation of Islam (615), a number of Muslims sought refuge in neighbouring Ethiopia in order to escape the persecutions of the Kurayshites in Mecca. The warm reception extended to them by the Negus (*Nadjaṣhī* in Arabic accounts) and his court ushered in a period of cordial relations between the two religious communities. This was echoed in early Islamic traditions.²

Africans in Muslim society

The Qoran – the ultimate Islamic text – must naturally form the basis of any discussion on Muslim attitudes on race and colour, but there are, in fact, only two passages in the Qoran which have a direct bearing on the subject. The first of these is to be found in Sūra XXX, verse 22, which reads: 'Among God's signs are the creation of the heavens and of the earth and the diversity of your languages and of your colours.' The diversity of 'languages and colours' is cited here as one of the signs of the omnipotence and versatility of the Creator.

The other passage, Sūra XLIX, verse 13, is more specific: 'O people! We have created you from a male and a female and we have made you into confederacies and *ḳabīla* so that you may come to know one another. The noblest of you in the eyes of God is the most pious, for God is omniscient and well-informed.'

Consequently, one finds no instances of racial or colour prejudice in the Qoran and not even any awareness of its existence. The aforementioned passages do, however, indicate a 'consciousness of difference', in that the second quotation places more stress on piety than on birth.

As Islam expanded, the Muslims, especially the Arabs, came into closer contact with various African peoples than before. In Arabic sources, the inhabitants of tropical Africa are usually divided into four great categories: the Sūdān, the Ḥabasha, the Zandj and the Nūba.

The term *as-Sūdān* (plural of *al-aswad* – 'black') is the most general in scope, being applied to all people of black colour without regard to their place of origin. Sometimes even the Indians, the Chinese and other peoples of Asia were included in this category. In a narrower sense, the Sūdān gradually came to mean the black Africans living to the south of the Maghrib, i.e. the inhabitants of the *Bitād al-Sūdān* ('the country of the blacks') *par excellence*.

As for the *Habasha* (the Ethiopians), their geographical proximity, as well as their association with Muḥammad's early history, made them the best-known group of Africans. Some authors, however, employed this term in a larger sense, counting among the *Habasha* even people living as far as the Niger or to the south of Egypt.

The *Zandj* (or *Zindj*) refer mostly to the Bantu-speaking peoples from the East Coast, who had, since pre-Islamic times, been brought as slaves to Arabia, Persia and Mesopotamia. However, that name soon acquired the meaning of 'blacks' in general.

2. See Chapters 19 and 20 of this volume.



26.1 *The Battle of the Clans*, from *Khamsa of Nizāmī*, a manuscript dated 866/1461, Baghdad. (Photo: Reha Günay; copyright: Topkapi Saray Museum. Topkapi Saray Library, Istanbul, H. 761, folio 115a, from Brasil Gray (ed.) *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia*, 14th-16th centuries, UNESCO, France, 1979

The *Nūba* (Nubians) became known to the Arabs after the conquest of Egypt; it is, however, very likely that the name also covered all Africans originating in the countries to the south of Nubia proper, i.e. the Nilotic and eastern Sudanic-speaking groups, who came to the lands of the Caliphate through the intermediary of the Nubians.

The slave-trade

The Arabs were not the originators of the trade in black African slaves. The enslavement of Nubians and other Africans can be traced back to Pharaonic times, as attested by numerous representations of slaves in Egyptian art. Black slaves were equally to be found in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds.

Once the phase of Muslim conquest was over, none of the protected subjects (*dhimmī*), such as Jews, Christians or Zoroastrians, could be reduced to slavery. Slaves had to be sought elsewhere in the countries near and far or obtained by raids, but mostly by purchase from weaker, less tightly knit societies that were incapable of defending themselves. One of the major areas where slaves could be procured was those parts of Africa inhabited by the blacks, i.e. the eastern littoral, Nubia, Ethiopia, and central and western Sudan.

Muslim law acknowledges only two sources of legitimate slavery – birth in servitude and capture in war.

In the first case, a slave is identified as one who is born of slave parents. The child assumes at birth his mother's status, free or slave, but a child born of a free man and a female slave in his employ is regarded as free-born.

However, birth in bondage could not constitute a never-ending source of supply of servile labour, on account of the free status of children born under the system of legal concubinage, as well as the high incidence of manumissions which tended to further diminish their numbers. The persistence of the institution of slavery in the Islamic world therefore depended on the constantly renewed contribution of peripheral or external elements, either directly captured in war or imported commercially, under the fiction of Holy War, from foreign territory (*ḍār al-ḥarb*).

Not all the details concerning the organization of the slave-trade in the Muslim world of this period are known to us. Nevertheless, we are acquainted with some of its salient features.

Slave markets were found in every important town throughout the Muslim empire. In the ninth century, some of these were usually situated at the opening of major international commercial routes and thereby played the role of distributing centres. The markets of Bukhārā, Samarkand, Niṣhāpūr, Rayy, Balkh and Marw served as terminal stations for the columns of Slav or Turkish slaves. Zabīd, Aden, Baṣra, Fezzān, Zawīla and Tripoli were centres through which black slaves were forwarded. Other markets were situated in the cities or areas where there was utilization of slave-labour. These were Baghdad, Samarra, Cairo, Cordova and Mecca.

Slave markets were under strict state control in order to protect the buyers from unethical business practices. The slave merchants, known as importers (*ḍjallāb*) or cattle dealers (*nakhhās*), inspired contempt for their occupation or envy for their wealth.

Prices of slaves were determined according to their place of origin, sex, age, physical condition and abilities. In Oman a good black slave could be bought for between 25 and 30 dinars. The Abyssinian Kāfūr, who later became regent of Egypt (945–66), was reported as having been purchased for the paltry sum of 18 dinars.

However, slaves endowed with exceptional talents fetched astronomical prices. Trained dancing-girls had price tags of between 1,000 and 2,000 dinars and a female singer was sold in an aristocratic circle in 912 for 13,000 dinars.

Employment and social conditions

Despite the lack of instances of racial or colour prejudice in the Islamic body of values, the provisions of legal guarantees and the favours of fortune, one must not be led to paint too rosy a picture of the social status of the black Muslim slave in the first centuries of Islam. In daily life and the realities of social relationships, prejudice, though not shown exclusively towards Africans, was nevertheless widespread.

An early interpretation of the inferior status of the black was based on the biblical story of how Hām, one of the sons of Noah, was condemned to be black for his 'sin'. The curse of blackness and, with it, slavery passed on to all black peoples who descended from Hām. This explanation, which was particularly popular among professional tellers of legends and stories and also even among scholars, has not been generally accepted. Al-Hamdānī explicitly refuted this tradition – which according to him originated with the Jews – on the grounds of the Qoranic verse (vi: 164): 'Each soul will earn only on its own account and none will be laden with another burden.' And he concludes with reference to the environmental factors: 'Black, white or brown skin of man has no other cause than the climate.'

Ibn Khaldūn, too, rejects the hereditary curse:

If the Thora says that Noah has cursed his son Hām, it does not speak about the colour of the latter. The curse only made Hām's sons slaves of his brothers' descendants. To link the skin colour of Blacks with Hām means an ignorance of the true nature of heat and cold, and of their influence on climate and on created beings.

Black slaves were employed for various purposes in medieval Muslim society – mainly as menial servants, concubines and eunuchs in harems, craftsmen, business assistants, members of forced collective labour forces in state enterprises, and soldiers. Their contribution to building the economic, political and social base of the medieval Islamic states was considerable.

At the bottom of the social ladder were to be found the 'Zandj', consisting mainly of East African slaves. In the extensive salt-flats of Lower Mesopotamia, these slaves toiled in gangs of 500 to 5,000 at the task of digging away the nitrous top-soil (*sebākh*) and laying bare the underlying fertile ground for cultivation. Life in the salt-flats and marshes and the conditions under which these slaves worked and lived were indeed dreadful; they were underfed and often fell victim to malaria epidemics and other diseases. These conditions, coupled with the harsh treatment they received at the hands of their taskmasters, engendered smouldering resentment and led to frequent revolts.

However, the nature of employment of the vast majority of slaves was essentially

domestic and military, with far more tolerable working and living conditions. In many, both modest and well-to-do, households, domestic chores were taken care of by one or more slaves, including manumitted ones. They were the cooks, chambermaids, wet-nurses, door-keepers, water-carriers and the like. In the harems of the wealthy, talented female slaves were afforded the possibility of becoming singers, musicians, dancers and poets, and thereby of beguiling the leisure moments of their lords.

The mating of Arab males with black women goes back to pre-Islamic times, generally with Nubians and Sudanese. Such matings took the form of concubinage rather than marriage. In the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, this was a common practice at every social level. A number of Arabic poets became enamoured of their bondmaids and extolled their virtues and beauty.

A famous text from the ninth century – al-Djāhiz's defence of the blacks against their detractors – shows clearly how much the blacks and whites were used to living together, at various social levels, particularly in Baṣra. The same author offers, moreover, many examples of the consideration in which the people from Africa and the Indian Ocean were held, at least until the time when the Zandj revolt caused many changes in attitudes.

The system of concubinage, favoured by Muslim institutions, resulted in the mingling of races and constituted an important element in the rural and urban populations.

Although there was a continuous flow of people of African origin to Muslim countries, the ease with which they were assimilated into the extant social framework has left differing marks on the population structure in that region compared with other areas with a numerous African diaspora. One of the most striking results of this assimilation process is that there are no large groups of racially different peoples, with their own separate history and culture, such as are to be found in the Americas.

In the upper layers of medieval Muslim society, concubinage with slave girls of African origin was nothing exceptional. A number of princes and caliphs had mixed blood inherited from their slave mothers. A Sudanese slave girl, the concubine of al-Zāhir, gave birth to the future Fāṭimid Caliph al-Mustaṣhir. She was a remarkable woman and ruled over Egypt after al-Zāhir's death and during her son's minority.

Male black slaves as eunuchs filled the palaces of the great of the land, especially as guardians of the harems. Some of them managed to rise to high office and played key roles in state affairs in the medieval period. This can be illustrated by several examples. The black eunuch Kāfir al-Ikhshīdi (966) rose to become regent of Egypt and Muflīḥ – 'the black' – the favourite of Caliph al-Rāḍī (d. 940), was responsible for the formulation of state policies. The chamberlain of the Buwayhid prince Aḍud al-Dawlah (982) was a black eunuch who was the only person to have succeeded in gaining the confidence of his suspicious and tyrannical master, an honour coveted by all.

The military role of slaves was one of the salient features of Islamic civilization and had considerable repercussions on the foreign and domestic policies of many Muslim states.

Black soldiers appear occasionally in early Abbasid times and, after the slave rebellion in Iraq, in which blacks displayed terrifying military prowess, they were recruited in large numbers. Already under the Abbasid Caliph Al-Amīn (d. 813), a special corps

of Ethiopian bodyguards, known as the 'Crows', was formed. In the fierce struggle for power during the reign of al-Muqtadir (d. 932), 7,000 blacks fought on the side of the caliphal party.

Aḥmad ibn Ṭulūn (d. 884), governor of Egypt and later its virtual ruler, mustered a large army of black slaves, especially of Nubians; on his death, he left, among other possessions, 24,000 white *mamlūks* and 45,000 blacks.

Black regiments became an important part of the Fātimid military forces. Their role became all the more prominent during the reign of al-Mustaṣṣir (1035–94), on account of the support they received from the Caliph's mother, a Sudanese slave. At the height of their influence, they numbered 50,000.

The revolts of the Zandj

The Zandj rose up in arms against the Caliphate on several occasions during the seventh and eighth centuries, but these revolts were easily quelled by the regular forces.

By contrast, the Zandj revolt of 869 was undoubtedly the greatest protest movement ever set in motion by black African slaves in medieval Islam. It lasted more than fourteen years and passed through two distinctive periods (869–79 and 879–83). The first period was one of expansion and great success for the insurgents. The second phase was a prolonged struggle against superior forces and the collapse of the Zandj state. The theatre of hostilities was the region of lower Mesopotamia and southern Persia.

The leader of this revolt was an Arab, 'Alī b. Muḥammad, widely referred to as *Sāhib al-Zandj* (Master of the Zandj). In the beginning, in order to legitimize and seek support for his cause, he claimed 'Alī ancestry. He did not, however, adhere to Shī'ite doctrine but rather to that of the *Khāridjites*, whose egalitarian doctrine allowed even an Ethiopian to be Caliph.

The revolt began as a class conflict between the exploited Zandj slaves and their masters. However, it soon turned into an open and violent war against the Caliphate. It was therefore a political and social struggle rather than a racial one.

The Zandj may very well have outnumbered the Caliphal troops, whose strength was reported as numbering 50,000, at least at the beginning of the struggle; but the latter were, on the whole, certainly much better equipped and fed, and were continually reinforced by newly arriving contingents.

The followers of 'Alī b. Muḥammad comprised the following main groups:

- (1) *The Zandj*, who were non-Arabophone slaves from eastern Africa, communicating with their leader only through interpreters.
- (2) *The Ḳarmāṭiyya*, who were an ill-defined group of African slaves, in all probability hailing from the Sudan and speaking Arabic. They had no links with the *Ḳarāmīta* movement.
- (3) *The Nūba*, which apart from Nubians, included Nilotic peoples as well; they were equally Arabic-speaking.
- (4) *The Furāṭiyya*, who were slaves of various origins dwelling on the banks of the lower Euphrates, south of the city of Wāṣit. They were clearly distinguished from the Zandj and spoke Arabic.

- (5) The *Shūrīdjīyya*, who were the navvies (*Kassāhīn*) employed on the salt-flats of lower Mesopotamia. Under this grouping were also to be found some free men and manumitted slaves, as well as the hired hands employed on the date and sugar plantations.
- (6) Lastly, there were the *Bedouins* inhabiting the marshy districts south of Wāṣīt.

The ranks of the insurgents were swelled by the desertion of black soldiers from the Caliphal armies.

It is not our intention to give here a detailed account of the various military campaigns of the Zandj revolt, but only a summary of the principal events.

In 870, the Zandj army conquered the flourishing port of al-Ubulla and destroyed it. Its fall terrified the inhabitants of the Persian harbour-town of 'Abbadān into submission. This paved the way for the invasion in the same year of the adjoining province of Khūzistān. The Zandj made themselves masters of Djubba and the capital al-Ahwāz.

The following year (871) witnessed the occupation and sacking of Baṣra, the principal port of Iraq. This was the most spectacular of the Zandj victories and a great blow to the Abbasid Caliphate. The terrible fate of Baṣra remained alive in the minds of succeeding generations.

The Zandj forces advanced successfully northward, capturing and sacking along the way the cities of Wāṣīt (877-8), Nu'māniya (878) and Djardjarāyā, seventy miles south of Baghdad. This was the culminating point of their northward expansion.

Between 881 and 883, the Abbasid crown prince al-Muwaffaq went on the offensive and pushed the invading forces southward and finally imposed a complete economic blockade on their capital, al-Mukhtāra.

In 883, after a siege of three years, the city succumbed to assault and the leader of the revolt and many of his commanders were slain.

There is no doubt that this long revolt, with its economic, political and social consequences, profoundly marked the whole of the Islamic world. At the same time it made Muslims more hostile towards Africa and Africans in general. The import of Zandj slaves seems to have been restricted or made subject to control. Another consequence was the widespread dissemination of the unfavourable image of the black in Islamic countries.

The cultural role

Africans made a significant contribution in the cultural sphere as poets, authors, musicians and experts in the Islamic sciences.

During the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates there were a number of distinguished black poets. An anthology of poems by one such poet, 'Irār b. 'Amr (early in the eighth century), the son of a black slave girl, is preserved for posterity in the *Kitāb al-Aghāni* and *Ḥamāsa*. Another black poet of unique talent and eloquence during this period was al-Haykatān. However, the most celebrated and eminent of these poets was Abū Miḥdjan (died in 726-7). Born in the Ḥidjāz of Ethiopian parents, he worked in his youth as a camel-driver.

In the early years of the Abbasid dynasty a black poet, Abū Dulāma (died c. 778), was famed for his wit, amusing adventures, acquaintance with general literature and talent for poetry.

The first really great representative of Arabic artistic prose was 'Amr b. Bahr al-Djāhīz (the goggle-eyed) of Baṣra (died 868-9), where he lived up to the age of 96. His grandfather was a black camel-driver. Though deformed in person, as implied by his sobriquet, al-Djāhīz was endowed with an incisive mind and a sagacious spirit. His learning was encyclopaedic and he was a versatile author of numerous works on almost every branch of knowledge. He was equally famed as a free-thinker and composed a discourse on the fundamentals of religion. An offshoot of the Mu'tazilite sect was called 'al-Djāhīziya' after him.

The Africans excelled also in the musical arts and several black virtuosi dominated the musical scene during the first two centuries of the Islamic era. The first and greatest musician of the period was the black Abū 'Uthmān Sa'id ibn Misḍjah (died c. 715). His desire to learn exotic musical techniques brought him to Persia and Syria. Upon his return to Hidjāz, he introduced Byzantine and Persian melodies into the singing of Arabic songs; he was acclaimed as one of the four great singers of the epoch.

Another celebrated black musician was Abū 'Abbād Ma'bad ibn Wahb (died 743); his art earned him the title 'the Prince of the Medinese singers'. Among his pupils was also Sallāma al-Ḳass, the mulatto female singer and favourite of Caliph Yazīd b. 'Abd al-Malik. Many other black musicians and singers attained glory during the Abbasid Caliphate.

Arabic biographical sources mention a number of African traditionists and scholars of religion. One of the most eminent was the black *mawlā*, Abū 'Abd Allāh Sa'id ibn Djubayr ibn Hishām (died 712), an authority on the rites of the Pilgrimage, Qoranic exegesis, laws of divorce and questions of ritual. The authority of another black, Abū 'Atā b. Rabāh (died 733-4), as a traditionist was widely acknowledged and the office of *mufti* at Mecca devolved to him. The first to distinguish himself in the fields of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* in Islamic Egypt was Yazīd b. Abī Ḥabīb (died 745), the son of a Nubian prisoner of war. A celebrated ascetic and great *ṣūfī* doctor was the black eunuch Abū l-Ḥasan al-Baghdādī, generally known by the name of *Khāyir al-Nassādj* (died 934). He worked as a silk-weaver before he was manumitted by his master.

Africans in India, southern Asia and China

Evidence of the presence of Africans in India during this period is scanty. As observed by J. Burton Page, 'there is little information concerning the numbers, status and functions of the *Habshīs* in the earliest Muslim period'. It is probable that a thorough and systematic examination of the Indian national archives, as well as the rich body of vernacular literature of southern and western India, would provide us with many valuable data. At present we are in a better position regarding our information on the presence of black African slaves in Indonesia and China.

Black African slaves were known in the Malay Archipelago as far back as the early part of the eighth century and were generally referred to as the *Zandj*.

In the chronicle of the T'ang dynasty of China, under the events for 724 there is

an account of the reception of an embassy sent by the ruler of the kingdom of Śrīvijāya centred at Palembang in Sumatra. A Zandj girl was offered as tribute, along with other exotic items. This was not an isolated event, since between 813 and 818 another Indonesian kingdom, that of the Javanese nation of Kalinga, dispatched three missions to the court of the T'ang emperor, Hsien Tsung. Among the rarities presented as tribute were several Zandj boys and girls. It is equally recorded in the chronicle of the Sung dynasty that, in 976, an Arab merchant brought to the imperial court 'a black K'un Lun slave with deep set eyes and black body'.

These 'black youths and maidens' represented only part of the large group of African slaves imported into the region by Arab merchants. A Chinese official in about 1178 showed awareness of this traffic in African slaves. Writing of an undetermined sector of the East African coast, which he calls *K'un-lun Ts'eng-chi*, he noted that savages with lacquer-black bodies and frizzy hair were enticed by offers of food and then captured. Thousands of these negroes, he further remarked, were sold as 'foreign slaves'.

It appeared that a proportion of this human merchandise was shipped by Arab traders to China via the Malay Archipelago. Canton was the principal port of arrival and distributing centre.

There is likewise evidence of the role played by African slaves in the social and economic fields. Chinese chronicles mention that these 'devil slaves' were employed on shipboard to caulk leaky seams below the water-line from the outside as they were expert swimmers who did not close their eyes under water. They also appeared to have been reasonably common as the household servants of the affluent classes in the main urban areas. G. Ferrand, drawing on Chinese classical sources, speaks of their role as musicians in the Sumatran kingdom of Śrīvijāya (*san-fo-ts'i*).

The world-wide presence of Africans was not initially brought about by the forced mass exodus to the Americas. It has been observed that already, from the seventh to the eleventh centuries of the Christian era, large numbers of Africans were to be found in many parts of Asia occupying various social positions and making important contributions in the economic, political and cultural fields.

It is regrettable that this image of the impact of Africa on Asia, though of major historical importance, is still a fragmentary one, and is based on non-African sources. For a complete and balanced account, there is an urgent need to study how Africans saw themselves in relation to others in their lands of exile.

The period from the seventh to the eleventh century was marked by the remarkable growth of relations between the various regions of Africa. The fact that this growth coincided with the Muslim expansion has led certain authors to say that it was the Arab conquest and Islamization that brought tropical Africa out of its isolation and linked it up with the rest of the world again. Yet, despite considerable gaps in the sources, the data currently available bear out the words of C. Coquery-Vidrovitch to the effect that one of the characteristics of African societies is never to have lived in isolation. The continent of Africa has known two major phenomena: population mobility and the considerable volume of long-distance trade. The work of E. W. Bovill, C. A. Diop and T. Obenga, among others, has shown the vitality of the relations between the regions north and south of the Sahara since antiquity.¹ These comments having been made, it must nevertheless be recognized that the integration of some parts of Africa into the Arab empire gave new momentum to inter-African relations.² Arab and Muslim influence produced a chain reaction right across the continent, and became the decisive feature in the development of the Maghrib, Egypt and the Saharan peoples from the eighth century onwards.³ Elsewhere it acted as an external factor whose importance varied according to the geographical position of the various regions in relation to the routes of penetration taken by the Muslims.⁴

The growth of inter-regional trade

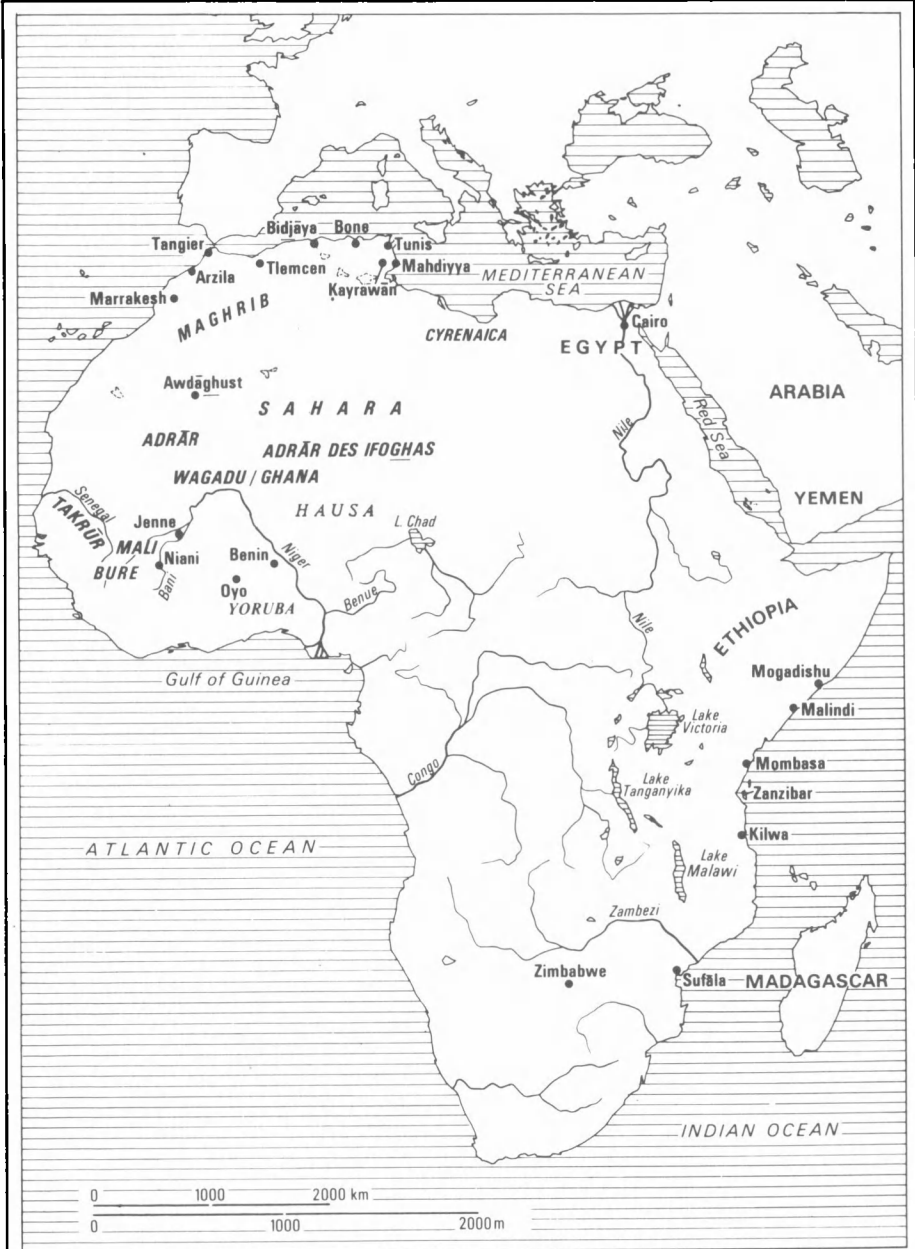
The Arab conquest not only brought about a profound change in the political geography of the Mediterranean world, which was dominated between the seventh and the eleventh centuries by the Muslim empire; it also, especially after the disintegration of that empire, gave 'international' trade unusual dynamism. In spite of the constant turbulence that characterized the superstructure of the empire, the Muslim world remained the mainspring of world trade until the thirteenth century.

1. See Volume II, Chapters 20 and 22.

2. On the Muslim expansion, see Chapters 2 and 3 of this volume.

3. See Chapters 7 to 12 of this volume.

4. See, for example, Chapters 19 to 21 of this volume.



27.1 Relations between the different parts of Africa from the seventh to the eleventh century. (A. Bathily)

Inter-African trade during the period under consideration was characterized by three fundamental features:

- (1) Progress in means of communication.
- (2) Expansion of the commercial network.
- (3) Increase in the volume of trade.

By strengthening permanent links between North Africa and western Asia, the Arab conquest created favourable conditions for the large-scale use of camels.

Although the camel had already been present in North Africa for some centuries, the widespread use of this beast of burden in trans-Saharan trade can be dated from the Islamic period onwards. Thus, in Morocco, crossbreeding of the two-humped camel of central Asia with the Arabian camel or one-humped dromedary, together with techniques of selection, produced two types of camel. One, slow of gait, but capable of carrying heavy loads, was used for trade; the other, faster and lighter, was used as a courser and bearer of news (*mehari*).

The western Sahara was also famous for the breeding of camels. According to al-Bakrī, the king of the Ṣanhādja possessed over 100,000 thoroughbred camels for his army. The number of camels making up the various caravans that plied between the Sudan, the Maghrib and Egypt all the year round ran into thousands.⁵

Another of the positive aspects of the Muslim expansion is that it gave considerable impetus to navigation. Powerful fleets were built up and enabled Muslim merchants to maintain the flow of trade between East Africa and the countries of the Indian Ocean, Red Sea and Mediterranean. Large harbours with dockyards for shipbuilding were founded in the Maghrib, such as Tunis (eighth century), Bidjāya (Bougie) and Mahdiyya (915), Algiers (946), Oran (902) and Arzila (tenth century). In Egypt the old harbour of Alexandria was revived. It was between the eighth and eleventh centuries that the typical large Mediterranean trading vessel, with a raised hull and two lateen-rigged masts, was evolved under the aegis of the Muslim navy; technically, it was a cross between the merchant ship of the ancient Mediterranean and the ship designs of the Indian Ocean. Well before the introduction of the compass and other navigational instruments, the Muslim seamen were able to ply the seas over great distances by employing a method known as the 'sidereal rose'.

Between the seventh and the eleventh centuries, trade between the various regions of the continent was booming. The growth of cities was the most obvious sign of this development of commercial activity. In about 757 an old market-place in the Tafilālet became a town, Sidjilmāsa, and the main staging-post for trans-Saharan trade. Kayrawān, destined to replace the old city of Carthage, was founded. In the mid-eighth century Tāhert came into being in the central Maghrib and in about 800 the Idrīsids made Fez into a flourishing city. Under the Fāṭimids, Cairo was the pivot between the Muslim East, the Muslim West and Africa south of the Sahara. In the western Sahara, Awdāghust became the market-place linking black Africa with Barbary in the same manner as Zawīla in the central Sahara. Routes that were much or little used according to the favourability or otherwise of the political situation linked these markets to others south of the Sahara. Thus, Ghana/Kumbi, capital of the empire of

5. See Chapter 14 of this volume.



27.2 From one encampment to the next: transhumance of shepherds in the Sahel region of Mali (near Gumbu du Sahel) (C. Meillassoux)

Ghana/Wagadu, Sillā and Barīsā on the Senegal river, and Kāw-Kāw on the Niger, connected the Muslim world with the savanna-lands and those of the West African forest. On the East African coast, Muslim merchants settled in trading centres such as Mogadishu, Barāwa (Brava), Malindi, Mombasa, Kilwa and Sofala on the mainland as well as on the islands of Pate, Ḳanbalū (Pemba), Kizimkazi (Zanzibar), etc.⁶

The new growth of towns that took place from the seventh century onwards led to the expansion of the trade network and then speeded up the integration of the various regional and local economies.

Products intensively traded during this period fall into four main categories:

- (1) Raw materials.
- (2) Subsistence products.
- (3) Luxury items for domestic use.
- (4) Luxury goods.

6. See Chapter 21 of this volume.

Raw materials

The most important raw materials were iron, flax, cotton, gum and indigo. Iron produced in the empire of Ghana was exported to other parts of western Africa. We know for certain that East Africa supplied India with iron. In the Maghrib the deposits at Ceuta and Oran and in the area between Salé and Marrakesh were still being worked in the eleventh century.

Trade in flax, cotton, gum and indigo is connected with the development of the textile industry. The growing of flax has been reported in the Maghrib, and of cotton in several areas (the Senegal river, Ethiopia, the Maghrib, etc.). Gum, which was used in the finishing of fabrics, came either from the gum-tree forests of the western Sahara or from Kordofān. Indigo, which is perhaps of Indian origin, was grown from the eleventh century in the Maghrib, which must have supplied it to the western Sudan.

Subsistence products

The distribution of subsistence products ranked first in volume in inter-African trade. Wheat from the Maghrib was exported by caravan via *Sidjilmāsa* to the western Sahara and the Sudan. Despite its large domestic market, *Egypt* could still export cereal surpluses by caravan to Libya and Nubia and by boat to Cyrenaica.

Millet, sorghum, rice and shea-butter from the western Sudan and olive-oil from the Maghrib were exported in all directions. Dried smoked fish prepared on the coast and in countries on rivers was sent to the interior. The salt trade was the main branch of the subsistence trade. Rock-salt from the Sahara and sea-salt competed with each other in the interior, but they could never satisfy the keen demand, as is witnessed by the very high value of this commodity, which, according to Ibn Ḥawqal, could reach 200–300 dinars a camel-load.

Luxury items for domestic use

Luxury items for domestic use consisted predominantly of slaves and horses. Arabic sources stress the importance of the trade in black slaves by Muslim merchants, but in fact this trade worked both ways. In the royal courts of the Sudan there were Berber and Arab slaves, and no doubt slaves of European origin. It is reasonable to suppose that economic growth and its corollaries (urban development and the splendour of court life) brought about a keen demand for servile manpower.

Nevertheless, to put forward estimates of the number of slaves exported by black Africa to the Muslim world, as R. Mauny and T. Lewicki have done, is extremely hazardous. The former of these two authors believes that the number of black slaves exported was somewhere around 20,000 a year or two million per century during the Middle Ages whilst, according to the latter, 12 to 16 million black slaves passed through Cairo in the sixteenth century alone. Such estimates are obviously exaggerated. There are at least three reasons to explain why this trade fell short of the figures put forward:

- (1) The low level of the Muslim economy of the period, which could not absorb such a quantity of slaves. Except for the Zandj (black slaves) from lower Iraq,⁷ no large body of blacks historically linked to the trans-Saharan slave-trade existed anywhere in the Arab world.
- (2) The high cost of slaves, because of the risks inherent in the desert crossing, which would not have permitted such a massive exodus. In this connection, it is significant that, in the Arabic iconography of the period, the slave merchant was often depicted as a man with a hole in his purse.
- (3) Until the Crusades the Muslim world drew its slaves from two main sources: eastern and central Europe (Slavs) and Turkestan.⁸ Black slaves were appreciated above all as domestic workers – eunuchs, concubines, wet-nurses, cooks, etc. The descendants of these concubines and wet-nurses were integrated into Muslim society as full citizens.

Owing to the development of trade between black Africa and the Muslim world, Arab horses multiplied in the savanna-lands, where the absence of trypanosomiasis made their survival possible. The trade in Arab horses (barbs) led to the gradual disappearance of the smaller, local pony-like race, the presence of which was still mentioned in the eleventh century. Numidia and Nubia gradually came to specialize in the breeding of Barbary horses, which they then exported to the western and central Sudan.

Luxury goods

Luxury goods consisted predominantly of textiles, precious metals, pearls and ivory. The literature of the period lays particular stress on the flowering of textile crafts in the Maghrib and Egypt. Silk goods from Gabès and woollen goods from Kayrawān were prized on all markets. Awdāghust exported red and blue dyed garments and the town of Taranka on the middle Senegal was famous for its fine cotton loin-cloths or *shakkiyyāt*, which merchants sent to the north and to the neighbouring countries. Social changes (urban development, enrichment of the ruling classes through foreign trade, and population growth) resulted in the development of increasingly extensive textile crafts in all areas.

As regards precious metals, gold of course held first place. During the period that concerns us, there were several producing areas which, to an unequal extent, supplied the rest of the continent and foreign markets. In decreasing order of importance these areas were:

- (1) The Bambuk/Galam and Bure in West Africa.
- (2) Southern Africa.
- (3) Nubia.

Copper was used as a raw material in the manufacture of art objects and other luxury items. Cut up into rings it served as currency in some localities (e.g. Sillā on the Senegal river). In any case, it was extensively traded between the producing areas (Katanga,

7. See Chapter 26 of this volume.

8. See Chapter 1 of this volume.

Air, western Sahara), the Yoruba countries and northern Africa, where the growth of the arts led to keen demand.⁹

The southern Maghrib and the central Sudan were famous for their pearls and precious stones (agate, amazonite, etc.). The Bēdja country between the Nile and the Red Sea contained deposits of precious stones and emeralds which were worked by the Muslims.

The dissemination of techniques

Trade and the population mobility that went with it were instrumental in bringing about the dissemination of techniques. The present state of our knowledge suggests that five branches of activity made progress and spread on the continent, viz.:

- (1) Mining and metallurgy.
- (2) Agriculture.
- (3) Crafts.
- (4) Trading techniques.
- (5) Techniques of war.

Mining and metallurgy

Mining and metallurgy were booming in all areas. In the Muslim west, attempts were made to improve the technique for treating ores. In Muslim Spain a new process was used for separating gangue from azurite and it seems highly probable that this method was also in use in the Maghrib. The debate on the spread of iron in Africa continues, but L.M. Diop's thesis of the indigenous origin of ironworking seems preferable to the hypotheses of dissemination from outside supported by several historians; in any case, it is now established that many African peoples went from the Stone Age to the Iron Age during the first millennium of the Christian era. The social processes going on all over the continent most probably led to the intensification and perhaps improvement of the techniques for the manufacture of metals.

Agriculture

In the sphere of agriculture, the period is distinguished by the spread of certain farming techniques and new plants.

In the Maghrib and the Saharan oases, for instance, a new system of irrigation involving the use of *foggāra* or stone conduits was adopted, and this made it possible to extend the cultivation of new crops such as rice, cotton and sugar-cane.

The Gangara farming area (Assaba, in Mauritania), consisting of walled fields and terracettes, whose ruins are still visible, no doubt dates from the Almoravid period.

Under the impetus of inter-regional trade, plants or new species were spread outside their area of origin. Some varieties of rice of Asian origin reached as far as the Egyptian oases and southern Morocco. Sorghum, a plant from Africa south of the Sahara, was grown in Upper Egypt, Cyrenaica, the Algerian Tell and even in Syria and southern Europe.

9. See Chapter 16 of this volume.

The date-palm, a native of Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf, was found in Egypt in the Pharaonic period, but the planting of it was intensified between the seventh and eleventh centuries. Southern Tunisia and the western Sahara were the main centres of the date-palm. The Muslim and Jewish commercial communities introduced to the Sudan (Ghana and Kānem) vegetables such as melons, cucumbers, etc., which were grown in gardens. The growing of bananas and coconuts was linked with the growth of the Indian Ocean trade.

Craft techniques

The process of dissemination of craft techniques is far less well known. Two facts deserve mention. According to al-Bakrī, Sfax, famous for its sheets, was indebted to Alexandria for the methods of pressing used by the people of that city.

The manufacture of paper from flax, and then from cotton on the Chinese model, brought about a literal revolution from the end of the tenth century onwards. While the parchment and papyrus used until then for the transmission of texts could not provide the conditions for a democratization of knowledge, cheap paper made by the new process gave a general impetus to intellectual activity.¹⁰

Trading techniques

The development of trade led to the adoption of increasingly sophisticated methods of payment. The most striking feature of this development was the progressive monetization of the regional economies. While the Maghribian monetary system was linked to that of the Muslim world (which was based on the gold dinar), a wide range of currencies existed in other parts of the continent: various kinds of shells, including cowries (*Cypraea moneta*) from the Maldiv Islands, copper rings, bars of salt and pieces of fabric were used concurrently for trading purposes.

In the Muslim world in particular, trading techniques developed remarkably. Merchants in that region already used drafts, bills of exchange (*sustādja*) and promises to pay (*shakk* or cheque). Tradesmen engaged in trans-Saharan enterprises set up a highly efficient network organized either on a family basis or on the basis of joint-stock companies, with correspondents in all the important places. They did business with countries outside the sphere of Muslim influence with the help of intermediaries (interpreters) recruited in the entrepôt centres such as Ghana/Kumbi. The 'silent trade' mentioned by a number of chroniclers after Herodotus seems, as Paulo Farias has shown, to be one of the myths that die hard.

Techniques of war

In the countries of the Sudanic savanna, the increase in imports of Arab horses and the growth of iron metallurgy on the one hand, and the internal development of the societies of the region on the other, led to a profound change in military tactics. Cavalry rather than infantry began to play a predominant role in battles. Weapon technology

10. On this question see Chapter 1 of this volume.

also changed. The bow and arrow, the 'democratic weapon' characteristic of egalitarian societies, was progressively replaced by iron weapons, whose manufacture presupposed a more highly developed social context. The manufacture of shields also made definite progress during this period. Thus the shields known as *Lamta*, manufactured by the Saharan tribe of the same name, enjoyed a great reputation as far as the Maghrib. All in all, thanks to speedier methods of locomotion (horses and camels) and the improvement of weapons, war was henceforth to play the prime role in the process of social evolution within African social groupings.

Basic features of the development of African societies from the seventh to the eleventh century

Three essential features characterized the social changes of this period:

- (1) Major population movements.
- (2) Acceleration of the process of social differentiation, as a result of the division of labour.
- (3) Development of the class struggle, as manifested in revolts and civil wars in several states.

Population movements

Population movements markedly changed the human geography of the continent. Whatever the outcome of the argument about the Bantu migrations, the movement of this people across Central, East and Southern Africa continued during the period that concerns us.¹¹ The development of trans-Saharan trade led several Berber groups to penetrate further into the Sahara. The pressure of these newcomers probably caused the exodus of certain black peoples such as the Proto-Wolof and the Sereer from Tāgant (Mauritania) to the south-west (western Senegal). The Soninke Dyula (tradesmen) of Ghana, who were middlemen in the trans-Saharan trade, founded a series of commercial centres on the Niger and its tributaries. The population of the east coast of the continent and Madagascar was swollen by the arrival of successive waves of migrants from Arabia, India, western Asia and Indonesia.¹²

Social differentiation

The acceleration of the process of social differentiation was the result of a more sophisticated division of labour. The major feature in this sphere was the emergence in the Maghrib and the Sudan of a class of professional middlemen trading between the different regions. These traders managed to transcend their racial differences (Berbers, Arabs, Jews and blacks) and constituted a genuine class, conscious of where its own interests lay.

As regards the military aristocracy, which held political power, foreign trade enabled

11. See Chapter 6 of this volume.

12. See Chapters 21 to 25 of this volume.

it to acquire additional means of dominating (arms and horses in the case of the Sudanic states, gold in the case of the Muslim states), which tended to strengthen its sway over the ordinary people. The general consequence of the development of trade was that it broke up social structures founded on kinship to produce a new social order based on ownership of the means of production (land in the Maghribian states) and trade. A recent version of the legend of Sundiata, the famous Mande emperor of the thirteenth century, suggests that the slaving expeditions of the Malinke princes in league with the Soninke traders acted as a stimulant in the emergence of the empire of Mali.

But trade was not the motive force behind the setting up of these states. It merely hastened the process on the basis of the internal dynamics of these societies, which had reached a level of maturity that allowed them to react favourably to external stresses. In particular, generating a surplus as a result of improved productivity was the basis on which trade with foreign communities was built up. Thus the social phenomena of this period were the outcome of the dialectic of the production and distribution of goods. The expansion of Islam was the result of interaction between the economic shifts and social changes that agitated most countries in Africa, in particular the Maghrib, Egypt, the Sahara, East Africa and the central and western Sudan. In some cases, Islam and its universalist doctrine offered the ideology for the expression of conflicts of interest between the various social groups. Thus the *Khāridjite* movement, Abū Yazīd's revolt, and other messianic movements that disturbed the Maghribian states during the period represented in social terms the rejection of the established order, and above all a determination to put an end to social injustice.

The class struggle

The development of the class struggle, and of social conflicts in general, took place with an intensity that varied according to local peculiarities and the degree of domination and exploitation that operated within each social group. For the Maghrib, C. A. Julien, A. Laroui and, to a lesser extent, G. Marcais have analysed the revolts and schismatic movements of the period as episodes in the class struggle.

In the Sudanic states the picture is less clear. But the fall of the empire of Ghana/Wagadu at the end of the eleventh century was probably the final consequence of a progress of internal decay. According to our hypothesis, this decay was due to the conflicts between two groups within the Ghanaian ruling class: one Islamized and allied with the traders, and the other loyal to the local religion and rural society. Internal dissensions were then aggravated with the sharpening of the contradictions between the people as a whole and the ruling class. Whatever the merits of this hypothesis, it has nevertheless been established that inter-African trade exerted contradictory influence on social groups on the continent. In some cases, it favoured political integration (the Almoravid and Fāṭimid empires, and later Mali and Songhay); in others, it led on the contrary to the disintegration of state structures inherited from earlier periods (Ghana and the Christian empire of Ethiopia).



*Africa from the seventh
to the eleventh century:
five formative centuries*

Introduction

There have been many attempts to find some general traits to characterize the overall evolution of the continent during the period between the seventh and eleventh centuries, but none really stands up to examination, whether one thinks of the continent as a whole or of any particular part of it. Neither the Muslim expansion, so characteristic north of the equator, nor what has been called the 'second Iron Age' – to which we shall have to return later – constitutes an indisputable general point of reference.

These simple observations should inspire us to be wary: research is making rapid progress and each of its discoveries calls into question the whole gamut of our previous certainties. This indicates how hypothetical and provisional are the conclusions that can be drawn today from the analysis of these five centuries. But it is still right that they should be set out for researchers and readers to reflect on, because, over these five centuries and for the first time so clearly, it is possible to trace a series of comparable developments throughout the continent.

These centuries saw the maturation of economies, socio-political formations and collective representations that were to underlie later historical movements. During these centuries slow germination was under way, which explains the flowering that was to follow.

The first striking general characteristic is the organization of areas of sedentarization, where agricultural production became dominant. The development of technologies constitutes a second major feature; this development involved a better exploitation of resources, the division of labour and the spread of exchange. The complexity of political regimes becomes decipherable to the historian, while at the same time the collective representations, religions and ideologies and the whole range of means of cultural expression which were to ensure their reproduction and transmission to later generations took shape.

The sedentary organization of space

Sedentarization results from a new relationship with the environment, made necessary both by climatic changes and by the demographic growth and increasing complexity

of societies. Demographic growth, which corresponds to an increase in the amount of labour necessary for the production of food, forms the best survival strategy invented by human groups, in Africa as in other continents. The study of these changes, in this period, is only just beginning; however, where archaeological surveys have been carried out, they reveal the importance of the quantitative search for food and the significance of the variations observed in foodstuffs and diet.

Central and Southern Africa

The Bantu expansion really came to an end in about the sixth century.¹ The sub-continent was thenceforward occupied by farmers where the climatic conditions allowed. In the forests of Central Africa, a farming technique based on a field cleared each year was developed. Yams, plantains and vegetables were grown there; food-growing was only one element in a complex in which trapping and gathering remained very important. South of the forest, in the tsetse-fly-infested savannas, the agricultural system was built around two fields a year; one cleared in the gallery forest and another in the savanna. Cereals were dominant and the complex was completed by hunting rather than trapping. In eastern and south-eastern Africa, as well as in South-Central Africa, food production was based on stock-raising and agriculture centred on the growing of millets, sorghum or finger-millet. Stock-raising predominated in the drier regions: this was the case in Botswana, northern Uganda and southern Sudan, as well as in neighbouring areas of Kenya. By 600, wholly pastoral ways of life, using cattle, only existed in the Horn of Africa, in the Sahel, on the edge of the Sahara and probably in an area going from southern Sudan east of the White Nile as far as central Tanzania. But, from the ninth century, a new variant of the south-east African economic complex developed in Botswana and came to be dominated by cattle-raising. It took several centuries to perfect a pastoral system that would enable the Khoi-Khoi to occupy all the sites favourable to stock-raising in Namibia and Cape Province.

East Africa

In East Africa the pastoralist expansion was probably linked to the diffusion of breeds of humped zebu and Sanga cattle. These breeds were known in Christian Nubia but in the White Nile region and the Horn of Africa they are to be found only after 1200. The Sanga breed, which is found as far as South Africa, where it gave birth to another breed, is older than the zebu breed. It may have spread during the centuries concerning us here and it may even have had something to do with the Khoi-Khoi expansion. The whole question requires further study. This breed may have played a role in the establishment of pastoralists in the Great Lakes region, which occurred during the period under review, and it may have led to a more intensive use of all the arid lands of East Africa. South-west Africa, too dry for agriculture, did not undergo very profound changes, even though the raising of ovines was practised there by the beginning of the Christian era.

1. See Chapter 6 of this volume.

West Africa

West Africa underwent an evolution that was at once comparable and different. Population growth was probably already being accompanied by a dangerous destruction of the forest cover. The meagre indications that we have for Sierra Leone and Liberia lead one to suppose that farmers were the first occupants of the region; in the forests of Nigeria the advance of the farmers into those areas is particularly well documented.

In the drier parts of the savanna and in the Sahelian zone, the climate had been changing for several centuries. This resulted in a gradual shift from the north-east towards the south-west or south of peoples in the process of becoming sedentarized and domesticating plants; they followed the rains and the minima necessary for a true agriculture, in areas where there were no water reserves formed by river basins. The complexity of the forms of settlement in the Senegal and Niger bends are gradually becoming clear; these two land areas surrounded by rivers had already become areas of high human density and greater economic complexity before the Christian era.

The Sahel is an area of stock-raising, with the consumption of milk, supplemented by the gathering of grasses, and with hunting to supplement the diet; cultivation there is only possible in places where the underground water-table permits the drawing of water and irrigation. Fishing, which existed in the neolithic period, had disappeared everywhere, thus depriving the inhabitants of their most constant and abundant basic food sources; perhaps it was the 'taste for fish' that led, in the Sahelian zone, to the buying of dried or smoked fish from the south. Importing became essential when certain economic imperatives obliged the peoples to live in an insufficiently productive environment.

The valleys were areas of complex organization, where land was probably bitterly fought over as the number of inhabitants, the division of labour and the organization of authority developed. In the seventh century, fishermen were practising the drying – perhaps even the smoking – and export of fish. The waters supplied many other food-stuffs, including turtles, shellfish and hippopotamus and crocodile meat.

A few kilometres away from the privileged area of the river basins, already highly elaborate forms of agricultural organization appear, sparing of water and skilful in making use of all the plants useful to life. It seems highly likely that many of the refined technologies for exploiting the soil were becoming organized between the seventh and ninth centuries.

The lands situated to the north of the rivers were gradually transformed into pasture areas. The spread of the Fulani from present-day Senegal began, most probably in these areas, in the eleventh century or perhaps earlier, and perhaps this too was linked to the acquisition of zebus.

The Sahara

During the previous two or three millennia, the Sahara and its northern and southern fringes had been gradually abandoned by its inhabitants as depleting resources failed to provide them with adequate food. The introduction of the camel into these areas

from the third century constituted a revolution in the field of food supply as well as in that of transport.

The oases became staging-points in transhumance systems, which made use of all the routes with an abundance of wells. The adoption of the camel made it possible to transport heavy loads over great distances, a factor which must be taken into account in any discussion of the rise of trans-Saharan relations, which became a large-scale phenomenon towards the end of the Byzantine period.

The peoples of the Sahara, who were overwhelmingly Berber-speaking, took control of the desert and began to play a new sort of active role. This coincided with the increased demand for gold by the Muslim states to the north; it gave the Sahara, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, a historical importance that it had not known for a long time.

Northern Africa

The relationship between the countryside and the towns, with its rejections and revolts, is better known than the organization of the producing communities themselves. At most, for example, one can glimpse that the Barghawāta in Morocco managed a coherent economy based on wheat, which they were in a position to export; that Sūs was producing sugar-cane in the ninth century; and that Ifrikiya was an enormous production zone, heavily geared towards exporting its products by sea.

In the Nile valley, which had long since been organized, there is nothing strikingly comparable to note. In Egypt the food problem was no longer simply one of production but one of urban over-consumption: feeding an agglomeration like Cairo, with several hundred thousand inhabitants in the eleventh century, posed problems out of all proportion to those facing the producing and consuming communities of black Africa. It was a state matter involving, on a country-wide level, the need to adopt a production, financial and import policy; and it therefore falls almost wholly outside the tentative analysis being made here for the rest of Africa.

Northern Nubia participated in the Egyptian economy, even though it was firmly controlled by the Christian ruler in Dūnḳūla, but to the south of the second cataract there was a new economic world. Beyond the last cataracts in the kingdom of 'Alwa began a zone where there were no palm-trees or vines, but white sorghum appeared, 'which looks like rice and from which the inhabitants make their bread and their beer'. Meat was plentiful because of the large number of herds.

The movement of African societies

The general movement of African societies from the seventh to the eleventh centuries was directed towards adjusting and perfecting food production complexes to meet growing needs. A natural population increase, though very slow and though we know little about it, was accompanied in many regions by a growing deterioration in relations with the environment. The two phenomena gave rise to slow population movements. This is the case with the reverse movement from the Transvaal towards Zimbabwe, beginning apparently in the eighth or ninth century, which seems to be linked to the

effects of over-population; it is the case too in the inland Niger delta, with the occupation, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, of mounds above the flood plain, which had previously been unexploited. In this area even moderate and short-lasting climatic changes probably precipitated phenomena of relative over-population or, on the contrary, created temporarily more favourable conditions.

The new production dynamics led of course to social changes. It may be said that the main processes of the integration of groups into coherent societies go back to this period. It was assuredly a time of 'ethnogenesis', of the absorption of old groups into larger ones and of relative linguistic integration, at least locally.

In the forest of Central Africa the hunters retained their pygmy physical type but lived in symbiosis with the farmers, adopted their languages and were socially and culturally absorbed to become a 'caste' in large groupings. In Zimbabwe and in Zambia the autochthonous peoples were wholly absorbed by the end of the eleventh century. Absorption proceeded more slowly in eastern Angola and the neighbouring areas of Zambia; the hunger-gatherers slowly retreated, as the growing population densities affected the distribution of game. They remained intact in southern Angola on lands where the Bantu-speaking farmers did not penetrate.

In West Africa, already complex communities settled in the sub-forest and forest zones. Their spatial arrangements brought together hunters, gatherers and agriculturalists in more complex societies. In river areas, production provided surpluses which made trade possible over medium distances and the division of labour became more pronounced between specialized producers. The nature of authority was now more complex.

In such relatively sedentary groups, living in environments that were better exploited until population pressure condemned them to various forms of segmentation, the African societies developed new technologies, and not only for food production. Securing better living accommodation quite clearly became a goal: the archaeology of the mud habitat has not yet provided much of the information that it can tell us. Although some authors think that whitewash was only used in Niani after it had been introduced by the Muslims, local mud was certainly used to build mud walls over a wooden framework as early as the sixth century (for example, there were mud buildings at Jenne-Jeno before any contact with the north). Although the structures built of sun-dried bricks at Tegdaoust and Kumbi Saleh are contemporaneous with contacts with Islam, the archaeologists are certain that they did not involve imported techniques.

Techniques and why they should be studied

One of the most pressing needs in African history and archaeology is the careful and detailed study of technical changes, and of the circumstances that precipitated or encouraged them. Pottery, metals and weaving can act as examples, although as yet very incomplete, of what studies of these matters can contribute to the history of the continent.

Pottery

It has become customary, especially in East and Southern Africa, to designate certain types of pottery by the name of the principal site where they were discovered; when dated by the excavators in satisfactory conditions, these can be used as sequential indicators for chronologies. The production of pottery, qualitatively and quantitatively, has become a demographic and economic indicator (trade and the area in which objects circulate), as well as a cultural indicator. The series of revelations made by archaeology in recent years is a pointer to what a more profound archaeology of African pottery holds in store for us: the appearance of the anthropomorphic terracottas of Ife and Owo, following those of Nok; the equally striking ones around the upper Niger; the specimens that are just beginning to be uncovered in Niger; the rare but interesting style that excavations in Mauritania have brought to light; the practice involving the paving of rooms and courtyards with fragments of potsherds – all these constitute the most spectacular elements in a corpus that is rapidly being enriched.

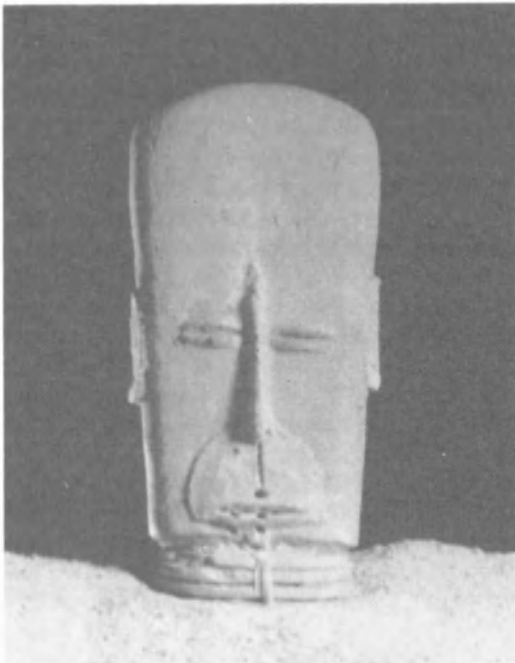
Leopard's Kopje pottery is one element in the creation of a much more complex society leading to the formation of a state about or before 900.² Conversely, the appearance of Kisalian pottery at Sanga in the eighth century was not accompanied by any such phenomenon and is more likely to mark the appearance of a community of fishermen-agriculturalists of a new type. The new pottery in Rwanda in the same or following century might be the sign of a quite minor change, although it marks the abandonment of the concentration of iron-smelting furnaces. But it could also signal a more far-reaching transformation flowing from the integration of specialized pastoralists into society.

Metals

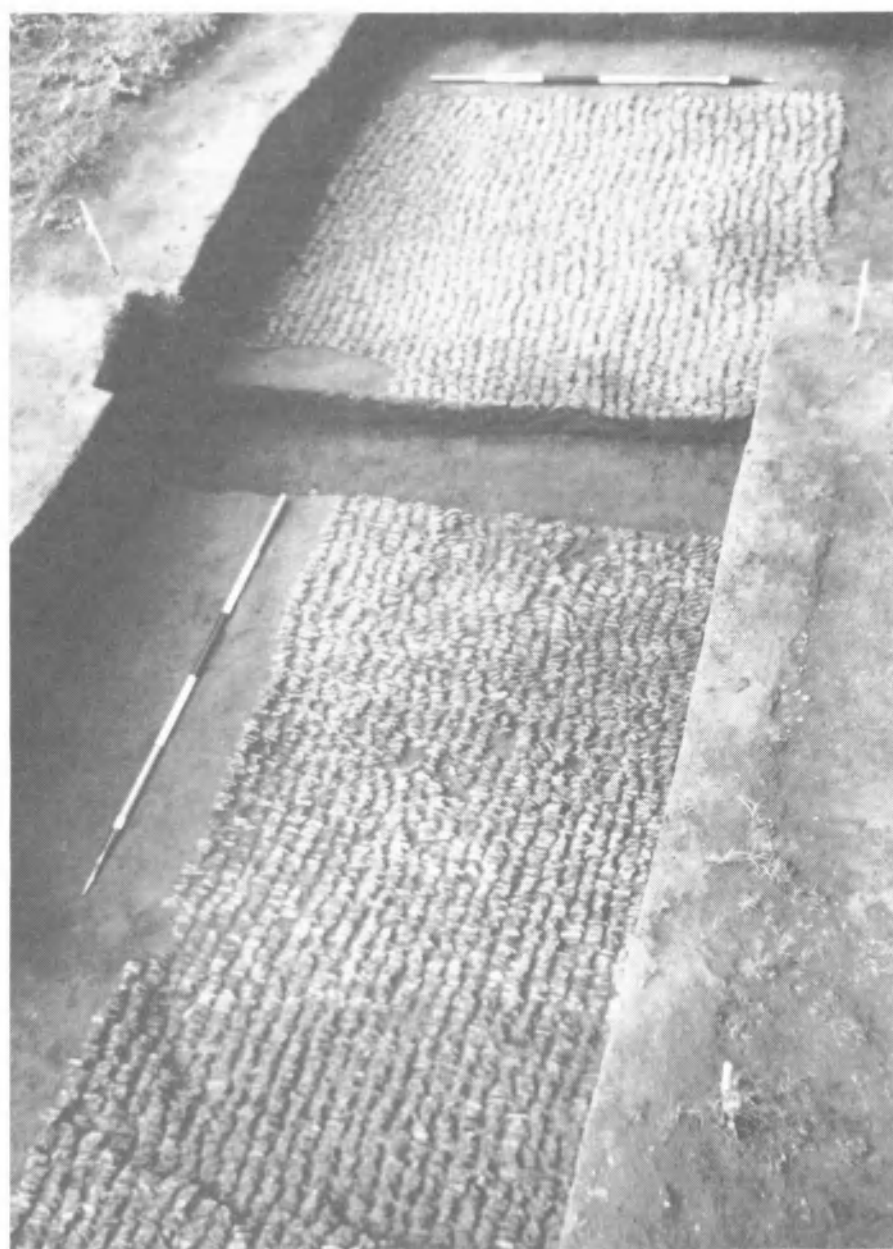
African gold has long been surrounded by myths and a sort of historical magic. Today we know a little more about it, and we are at last moving from the imaginary to more quantified assessments. Present-day Zimbabwe came into prominence at this time, the last of the old producing regions, after Nubia and West Africa. In this latter zone, alluvial gold was certainly exploited before 600, although the demand might have been local. The quantities were small, and it is unlikely that it was extracted by digging mines. With the establishment of the Muslim states, demand grew and, throughout the period looked at here, exports of gold were larger. It is extremely difficult to assert that before the tenth century a mining technology involving the systematic digging of mines had been developed, even in the case of Nubia. It is likely that the more and more widespread discovery of areas of active panning was enough, for a long time, to meet the demand; it is certain today that gold from the forest zones of West Africa was, by c. 1100, already being exported northwards. The evidence of written sources makes it quite clear that mines were being dug in the fourth century; archaeology has also provided proof of it on the Zimbabwe plateau but it is not at all unreasonable to think that the digging of mines was already occurring in the tenth century. Metal-smelting was known in the regions where ore was exploited;³ it

2. See Chapter 24 of this volume.

3. See Chapter 14, for Tegdaoust.



28.1 *Terracotta statuettes produced within the territory of the present-day Republic of Niger between the sixth and tenth centuries. An example of discoveries made in 1983. (B. Gado, Director of the Institut de recherches en sciences humaines, Niamey)*



28.2 *Potsherd pavement: the corner of a courtyard, excavated at Ita Yemoo, Ife. Scale is in feet. (Photo: copyright Frank Willett)*

would perhaps be incautious to say that techniques of gold-working did not exist in the producing regions. It is likely that filigree-work, so widespread in Andalusia and North Africa as early as the tenth century, reached the south from these regions. Filigreed gold ornaments have been found at Tegdaoust and filigreeing was used for objects in copper alloys at Igbo-Ukwu in Nigeria.

South of the Sahara, copper rivalled gold as the favoured metal and the raw material for luxury articles. Areas where the raw material was produced and the metal was smelted were, in the seventh century – and in many cases much earlier – more numerous than was formerly thought. Mauritania, Niger (Aïr), the copper belt (Zaïre and Zambia) and the Transvaal (Phalaborwa) were producing and exporting it throughout the centuries covered in this volume. Trade in this metal certainly brought copper and copper alloys from the north to south of the Sahara. However, the picture that we have today of this trade is much more complex than it was formerly; it can no longer be accepted that products and techniques came exclusively from the north. In Central Africa, copper became standard currency from 900 and, in the Transvaal, the Phalaborwa mine was producing the metal and was no doubt not the only one.

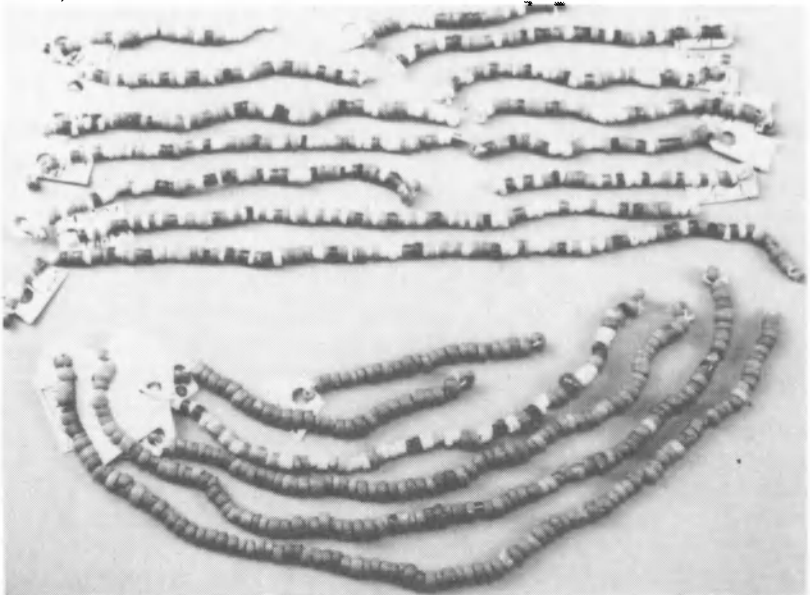
The extraction techniques seem to have been limited to the digging of pits and horizontal galleries; systems of deep galleries were rare, both for copper and for gold. Knowledge of how to cast bronze existed in Mauritania and in the Aïr long before the Christian era, and in the fifth–sixth centuries in the copper belt. Lost-wax moulds have been found in the excavations at Tegdaoust (Mauritania); they date from the eighth–ninth centuries; processes well adapted to the various types of metal have been recognized at Igbo-Ukwu, where euphorbia latex replaced wax. It is now firmly established that the metallurgy of copper and its alloys was perfectly mastered, in tropical Africa, in the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries. Hammering, cold spinning and casting using the lost-wax process were used, each with the appropriate metal: zinc and lead-based bronzes and brass provided a known range of different metals for the production of different objects; even welding was adapted to the known qualities of metal.

Contrary to all formerly received ideas, the existence of an ancient and well-mastered copper metallurgy must today be accepted. It is no different with iron. The technological history of this metal still remains very little known, despite detailed studies of certain metallurgical sites in West and East Africa and at Phalaborwa. Different types of iron might have been produced, but we do not know how far production was controlled or how the different processes, from extraction to the final product, evolved, beginning with the building of furnaces. The cartographic distribution of types of furnace and equipment (bellows, hammers, mauls, anvils, wire-drawing stones, etc.), as well as fuels and ways of using them, shows that there was major technological activity in the past. We observe that iron was present, in numerous regions, from the seventh century onwards and that it supplied the raw materials for implements (axes, working hoes), weapons (cutlasses, spears, arrowheads, harpoon tips, knives), various utensils (scissors, needles) and also ornaments (necklaces, bracelets, rings). Ethnographical data at least make it possible to pose a certain number of problems. What was the iron used for? What was its real importance? How was it related to copper and other objects of value or jewels or exchange materials region



28.3 ▲ Cornelian pendants and strings of cornelian and glass beads from the burial chamber at Igbo-Ukwu; beads from Igbo Richard. (Photo: copyright Thurstan Shaw)

▼ Strings of coloured glass beads from the storehouse regalia at Igbo-Ukwu. (Photo: copyright Thurstan Shaw)



by region and period by period? A history of iron metallurgy and the use of its products is certainly destined in part to overturn many previously received interpretations.

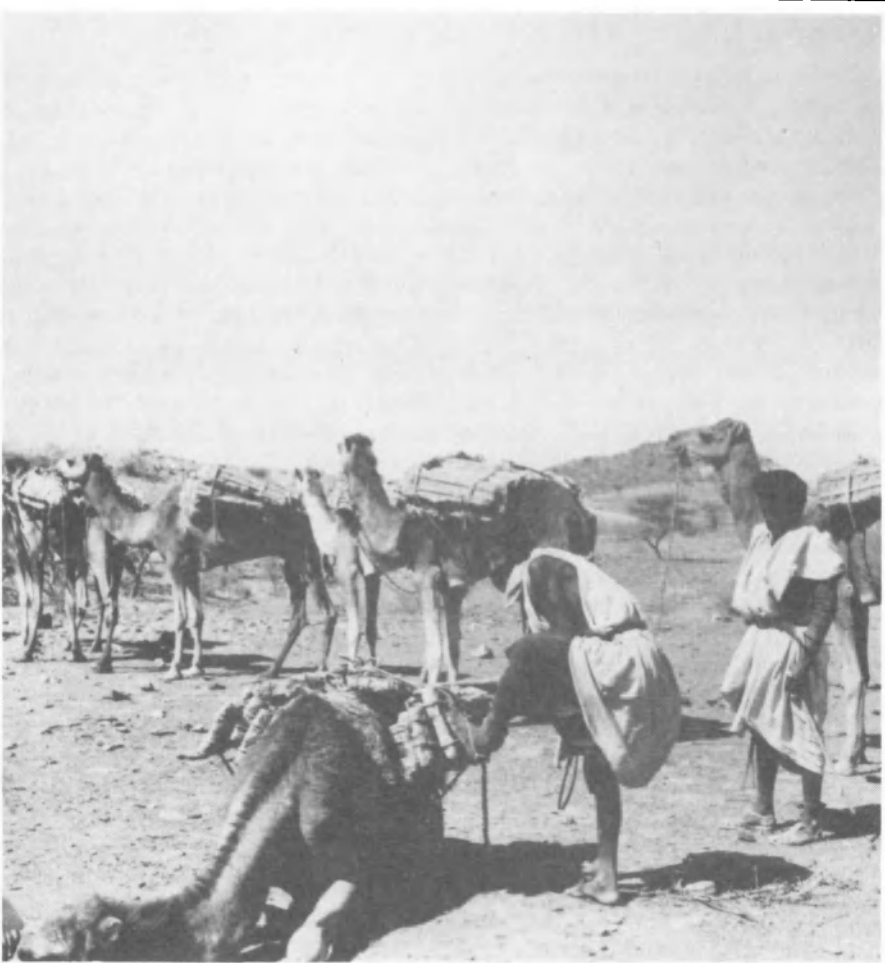
Cloth

There has been weaving in Egypt and Nubia for millennia. After the beginning of the Christian era, Coptic techniques reached heights never later surpassed. But cotton as a raw material was recent. The plant had probably been imported into Meroë. The debates relate to the development of weaving, especially using cotton, south of the Sahara. Cotton was present in the villages in the Senegal bend, by the tenth century; cloths woven from narrow strips have been found among the Tellem, dated to the tenth–eleventh centuries. It is important to point out that cotton-weaving was widespread in Ethiopia and, as early as *c.* 900, in southern Mozambique and at Mapungubwe. Cotton was already being cultivated and woven in tropical Africa in the ninth–tenth centuries. This weaving required two key elements: the spindle-whorls, to allow spinning, and looms. Abundant spindle-whorls have been discovered and identified with certainty for the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries; they are rarer for earlier periods, in the present state of our knowledge. As for looms, they are different in Mozambique and in West Africa. In subsequent centuries, weaving and the sale of cloth were to become economically very important; it is thus important to know the beginnings of this activity, which was not only to supply new articles of clothing, but also to provide marks of social distinction and objects to be exchanged and hoarded.

In sub-Saharan Africa, not only cotton was woven. The raffia palm produces a fibre that can be woven. Where this palm-tree grows, in West and Central Africa, the fibre is woven on quite a broad vertical or horizontal loom, with one main heddle. It is not impossible that this loom is older than the West African loom, or it may be of more recent invention. Raffia fabrics were particularly important in Central Africa, where the technique of decorating them was highly developed before the sixteenth century and where raffia squares were used as money. In the forest zone, the production of bark cloth treated by hammering was highly developed. In the open savanna, leather remained the main clothing material. These facts run counter to the argument that the practice of weaving cotton spread as a result of the Muslim impact, as a consequence of the desire to combat nakedness. This line of reasoning begins to carry little conviction as soon as one realizes that other forms of clothing were known.

Salt

Among all the products that most probably increased in quantity during our period, salt represents a particularly interesting one. Salt was obtained from the Sahelian, Ethiopian and East African salt-mines in the form of rock-salt bars. It was also obtained from evaporating sea or lagoon water, by collecting deposits, as in the lower valley of the Sine-Saloum in Senegal, and through highly sophisticated techniques using the ashes of xerophilous plants to extract the salt from them by leaching. However, the superiority of sea or Sahara salt was such that it was exported over great distances;



28.4 *Salt production – Walata: a caravan from the sebkhra of Idjil (Mauritania), carrying loads of bar-salt. (Photo: copyright Bernard Nantet)*

in some regions, notably Ethiopia, at certain periods, salt was used as currency. Salt was a greater source of income for coastal dwellers than fresh or dried fish and shellfish and they exchanged it for all sorts of products they needed. It is difficult to conceive of the settlement of peoples in the salty areas of the Niger delta – and this probably happened in the period we are looking at – without the supply of foodstuffs and implements from the interior, but, thanks to salt, this supply posed no problems. In the same way, the inhabitants of the Sahara secured the cereals they needed by exchanging them in the Sahel for salt from their mines. The example of salt thus takes us from technological considerations to the unequal distribution of resources and the trade resulting from it.

The various forms of trade

Local exchanges, over larger or smaller areas, had certainly been going on for a very long time in some essential products such as salt or metals, and for jewellery and ornaments too, which were sometimes transported over great distances.

During the five centuries we are looking at, trade developed spectacularly, and its high point was the trans-Saharan trade. Before the beginning of the period, some internal Sahelian trade existed and no doubt links with the Nile valley and North Africa, especially along a link between Lake Chad, the Kawār and the Fezzān. But it still remains true that from *c.* 800 this trade underwent a dramatic increase. The classical Saharan system, with exports of gold and foodstuffs going north in exchange for the import of salt from the desert and manufactured products from the north, became established in our period.⁴ This trade even went very far. In the ninth century, it probably delivered thousands of beads to Igbo-Ukwu, this site being also linked to the sea to the south. By *c.* 1100, the trade reached the edges of the forest in the area that later came to be called the Gold Coast. The expansion of trans-Saharan trade had major consequences on the development of state institutions in the north from Morocco to Egypt, between the eighth and the eleventh centuries, as well as to the south, between the Atlantic and Lake Chad, during the same centuries.

The role of Ethiopia in international trade collapsed with the major changes in the great Indian Ocean traffic between the sixth and eighth centuries. By contrast, the coast of East Africa assumed much more importance. In the eighth century, traces of imports have been found from the coasts of Somalia to those of southern Mozambique.⁵ Gold, ivory, wood and slaves were exported as well as a few luxury products, while imports included luxury products, such as beads and cloth. Although this was an unequal exchange, it gave an impetus to the development of internal communications; in the Limpopo region, this trade speeded up or strengthened the construction of large political entities.

However, overall economic growth and commercial expansion were not comparable in all societies on the continent. North Africa belonged to the centre of a 'world' economy and technologies developed there through diffusion from one end of the Muslim world to the other, as with the planting of sugar-cane or date-palms. Egypt, Tunisia and the leading Muslim cities in Morocco became great manufacturing centres, which exported notably to West Africa. East Africa was linked in an even more complex way to the economy of the Muslim world, as well as to the economies of China, India and Indonesia.⁶

On the other hand, there remained regions which were hardly or not at all affected by international trade. Southern and Central Africa provide the most extreme examples, although there developed in Central Africa a regional commercial zone centred on the copper belt which was in indirect contact with the Indian Ocean before 1100. It was based on the exchange of products from different environments and from

4. See Chapters 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 27 of this volume.

5. See Chapters 21 and 24 of this volume.

6. See Chapters 1 and 21 of this volume.

salt-mines. To judge from later periods, salt and iron, fish and raffia cloth, palm-oil and *mbafu* oil, and red dyewood were all exchanged, and the general movement was above all from north to south, crossing the ecological zones.

The interior of East Africa remains a problem. No trace of imports has been found there and it has been concluded from this that there were no links between these regions and the neighbouring coast. It is difficult to believe that this was so. Perhaps these imports were limited to salt and cloth, the products exported being ivory and hides. Relations with international trade were at best indirect.

In Ethiopia regional trade doubtless survived and probably spread with the transfer of the centre of the kingdom to Lasta. Southern Ethiopia, especially Shoa, saw its links with the outside world develop and the settlement of Muslim traders exporting through the coast of the Horn.⁷ The Christian kingdoms of the Nile traded with the Muslims, who supplied the Nubian court and the privileged classes with Mediterranean products – cloths, wines, grains – in exchange for slaves. The quest for the latter necessitated relations with the Chad basin area and with regions to the south of Nubia.

The overall situation of the continent was very new compared with the previous period. The integration of the Sahara, of West Africa, of the eastern coast and part of Zimbabwe and the Transvaal into an intercontinental trading network was new, as was the development of regional trade networks. The complete absence of a network, even a regional one, was rare, but was probably the case in a few pockets such as Namibia and the Cape region, the forests of Liberia and perhaps the neighbouring regions, the interior of East Africa, and part of the savanna-lands between Cameroon and the White Nile. Commercial drive was a first fruit of sedentarization and the adjustment of production systems. This period thus represents a starting-point from which the economies and trade were to develop in even more intensity, volume and complexity between 1100 and 1500. The regional networks would develop and coalesce but always in a subordinate position in relation to the areas of international trade. And by *c.* 1500 hardly any part of the continent would remain outside a regional trading area.

Societies and power

The social history of the continent also still remains to be written for the period that concerns us. We know virtually nothing of the real life of the times, the arrangements regarding kinship and living and working together. Even the history of the institutions that structured these relationships, such as the family, the extended family, the household, marriage and work groups, remains unknown.

The division of labour and its consequences are more visible. Between the seventh and the eleventh centuries, it progressed spectacularly, with societies becoming stratified. Wide divergences of economic and social statuses – classes – appeared in this period, but we do not know how relations between these classes actually functioned.

7. See Chapter 20 of this volume.

In northern Africa, Nubia and Ethiopia, we see aristocrats whose landed property, however acquired, was the basis of their power. In North Africa this aristocracy surrounded itself with numerous clients (*mawālī*), slaves, servants, workers or warriors; it had sufficient power to be able, in some instances, to oblige the official power-holders to treat with it. It may well have been more or less the same in Nubia or Ethiopia.

Further south, things are less clear; researchers are still engaged in lively debates on the existence of clearly distinct classes at this time; and in even livelier ones on the existence of closed castes, comparable to those occasionally found in Africa in later centuries. The most recent research, at least for West Africa, tends to suggest that castes were of recent rather than ancient appearance.

In Central Africa things were rather different from what they were in the north and west of the continent. In equatorial Africa, some division of labour appeared: the forest people attached themselves in some cases to certain groups of hunters (especially pygmies) by supplying them with food (notably plantains) and iron implements in exchange for game and honey. This symbiosis necessitated significant surpluses of foodstuffs; it could not have developed before plantains became a basic crop or before the period when the density of agriculturalists had increased to the point where it disturbed the hunters. This arrangement was quite different from the regular commercial relations between agriculturists in the forest and professional fishermen, who supplied them with fish, pottery and vegetable salt in exchange for vegetable foodstuffs.

The place where the ongoing social changes can be seen best is in the towns. The history of the process of urbanization is now undergoing radical revision. It was long thought that it was linked exclusively with Muslim influence, owing to the fact that Muslims were great founders of towns wherever they lived. But many urban agglomerations existed before Islam: this has been spectacularly shown for Jenne-Jeno and in the south-east of the continent as well.⁸ These examples are more conclusive than those involving towns where the settlements of Muslims played an obvious role, such as was the case with Kumbi Saleh, Tegdaoust and Niani. It is of the greatest importance for the future of this research on urbanization that the rewarding work done at Ife, Igbo-Ukwu, Benin, Begho and Kong should be pursued and developed.

Similarly, research on Nyarko, on the edge of gold-bearing areas of the forests of modern Ghana, which was already a town as early as the eleventh century, should be pursued. No doubt other proto-urban or urban centres founded during this period will be discovered.

Contrary to the impression left by the vast majority of ethnographic works, West Africa was not a collection of villages brought together in ethnic groups with distinct rural cultures and languages living cheek by jowl without influencing one another. As soon as towns appeared, they became cultural centres that influenced vast areas around them. Complex cultural and social spaces were formed before the eleventh century and it is this which explains the diffusion of languages such as Mandingo, Yoruba and Hausa.

New questions along the same lines can now be raised concerning the trading posts

8. See Chapter 24 of this volume.

along the East Coast and in Madagascar, their African and Malagasy foundation and the place of Muslim traders in their development.⁹ Already it is being asked whether the Swahili culture was not, from its very beginnings, an urban civilization; the debate is far from closed. The trading posts situated in present-day Mozambique maintained contacts with the Limpopo valley and indirectly made a contribution to the creation of a first proto-urban centre at Mapungubwe, which was also an administrative centre and the first stage in a development that would culminate in the creation of Zimbabwe in the thirteenth century.¹⁰

Equal attention should be paid, in the north of the continent, to the creation of important towns on which very limited research has yet been done. While the evolution of Fez, *Ḳayrawān*, Marrakesh and Rabat, for example, is well known, there has been very little work on *Sidjilmāsa*, *Tāhert* or *Sadrāta* and the whole of the *Mzāb*, *Ḡhadāmes*, or on the Egyptian and Nubian cities of the middle Nile valley.

After a short period of theoretical unity under the authority of the eastern Caliphs, there followed in North Africa a political breakup of vital importance for the future. New states came into being in Egypt and present-day Tunisia and also around important cities such as Fez, *Tāhert*, and *Sidjilmāsa*. They became more and more firmly established in the ninth and tenth centuries. In particular they used West African gold to ensure the quality of their currency. One fact was gradually becoming established: the territorial basis of the Muslim dynastic rulers, especially in Tunisia, in Egypt and then in the eleventh century in Almoravid Morocco, had become a more or less stable, more or less permanent reality. Muslim states, with their functions and their machinery, were established in this period, even though the dynasties changed and incidents such as *Abū Yazid's* revolt or the *Hilalian* invasion or Christian attacks from Sicily disturbed their territorial control from time to time.

In West Africa the organization of states probably began before 600, but becomes apparent during the period studied here. *Gao*, *Ghana* and *Kānem* are today apparently well known but there are many other areas where less research has so far been done and for which the existence of state authorities is no longer in doubt during the period involved. The inadequate information has led many scholars to believe that African authorities were no more than 'chiefdoms' without any great territorial consistency; but it has to be asked whether it is legitimate to look at the case of *Ife* in this way? Are we to believe that the power of *Sumaoro Kante*, of *Soso*, which rivalled *Ghana* and the *Mande Mansaya* until its defeat by *Sundiata* in the thirteenth century, was not yet a state? And what was happening among the *Hausa* or the *Yoruba*?

In north-east Africa, the period saw the apogee of the Christian kingdoms formed in the sixth century, particularly in the three sections of *Nubia*, whose economic and cultural success was still evident in the eleventh century. *Ethiopia* was in a worse situation, but the monarchy re-established itself, after the collapse of *Axum*, at *Lasta*, in the eleventh century; at the same time a series of Muslim principalities was formed in the east and south, reaching the *Ethiopian lakes*.¹¹

9. See Chapters 21 and 25 of this volume.

10. See Chapter 24 of this volume.

11. See Chapter 20 of this volume.

The organization of a dominant authority in each town seems to have been the rule along the East Coast. In present-day Zimbabwe a state was formed in the tenth century, with its capital at Mapungubwe. In Central Africa or the interior of East Africa, large-scale territorial developments have not yet been observed. All that one can say is that at Sanga the data suggest a slow evolution towards a 'chiefdom', an evolution that only became clearly established towards the end of the tenth century.

Outside these developments we have no direct evidence on the subject of other types of political organization. In East and South-east Africa the spatial organization of habitats suggests a form of collective rule conducted by leaders of large groups on the basis of a kinship ideology. In such cases there were no dynastic pre-eminence, no hierarchies, no marked difference in standards of living. The fact that we are here dealing with agglomerated sites suggests the likelihood of collective government. The data also probably indicate that the territory thus controlled was very small, corresponding perhaps to a village. Altogether comparable examples can be studied in the forest zones of West Africa.

Collective representations: religions, ideologies, arts

A large part of the African continent was divided between two monotheisms. One – Islam – was continually expanding between the seventh and eleventh centuries, while the other disappeared from the whole of northern Africa, where it had been established in the Roman period, and continued to exist solidly only in Nubia and Ethiopia, although a large Christian minority survived in Egypt.¹² However brilliant these African Christianities may have been, and they were particularly rich in monasteries, they lived on without much contact with the world outside.

The influence of Islam, a religion and a culture that spread right across the known world from Asia to the Atlantic and for a long time separated the blacks in Africa from the peoples to the north of the Mediterranean, grew stronger and stronger. In the tenth century its unity was strongly threatened by the temporary triumph of Fāṭimid Shī'ism throughout Muslim Africa but in the eleventh century the advance of Sunnism, based in Africa on Mālikite law, began. Gradually, Muslim norms were to triumph, in profoundly Islamized areas, over older cultural ways. Broadly speaking, it can be estimated that this had happened throughout the north of the continent by the end of the eleventh century. Advances were made in the Sahel and along the East Coast, but in these last two cases the real cultural triumph of Islam was to come only in the following period.¹³

For historians it would be more important to know what African religion was at the time. We can only interpret the few snippets of information we have with the help of that relating to much more recent periods. There is much talk of 'rain-makers', of 'charms', of 'ancestor worship', of 'idols', of 'sorcery'. This sort of approach simply masks our ignorance; it stresses the reassuring continuities and eliminates any evolution. Here we are in presence of another great lacuna in research on ancient Africa.

12. See Chapters 3 and 4 of this volume.

13. See Chapters 3, 4 and 10 of this volume.

The notion that cultures have of the authorities to whom they entrust the leadership of societies is linked both to the dominant ideologies and to economic structures. The monotheisms placed all authority in the light of the service of God and of a delegation of authority made by Him. Even if the *imām* of Tāhert did not resemble the Fātimid ones, even if the latter saw themselves closer to God than the Aghlabid *amīrs* or Idrīsīd princes, all these dynasties ruled in the name of God and the Qoran. The situation was exactly the same, in terms of the relationship with God, with the Nubian kings and the Neguses of Ethiopia.

The situation was different in parts of Africa which had remained faithful to its religion and the socio-economic structures to which it gave rise. The development of large states led to the appearance of a special conception of power often improperly called 'divine kingship'. The holder of power was 'sacred', i.e. respected in so far as he fulfilled the conditions of the human contract that bound him to his group, and was also feared, as well as obliged to transgress the ordinary rules of social life; the example most often cited of these transgressions is incest. This individual had a positive effect on the environment and fertility, on rain and water, on food, on social harmony, on the life of the community. By tacit consent, he possessed supernatural powers inherent in his function or obtained through an accumulation of charms. The queen-mother or the king's sisters or even his wife played a major ritual role. The king must have no physical defect, must not see blood or corpses; he remained invisible to the people and hid his face, communicating with others through intermediaries. He ate alone and nobody must see him drink. If he should fail seriously in one of his obligations, especially as a regulator of the harvests, in the integrity of his body or by exceeding his power, he was more or less summarily subjected to physical elimination. Here, no doubt, lies the greatest concrete difference in the exercise of power in comparison with the Mediterranean worlds.

The similarities between African political powers were often explained in the past in terms of a shared, single pharaonic origin. Today there is greater stress on the antiquity and local origin of some of the typical features of these political powers and their relations with the land, with hunting, with rain. It is also likely that these powers borrowed from one another their most attractive and impressive features: a degree of uniformity perhaps emerged from these borrowings.

An ideology of royalty was certainly also associated with the creation of a kingdom at Mapungubwe. The king was the supreme rain-maker controlling the rainfall, this being obviously a crucial attribute in a country where rainfall was variable and all crops depended on it. But we know virtually nothing of the other components of this ideology.

The complexity of the aspects of power appears almost physically in the period under review. In regions where trade became essential, power could not be indifferent to the way in which it was controlled; nor could it be to the mastery of gold, copper or iron, for example. Thus aspects of power made their appearance which did not exist in a society of hunter-gatherers or in a simple farming group.

Thus, the history of the political power seems, in the final analysis, in Africa as elsewhere, to be much more linked to economic and social changes than to ideology. Ideology created, as the need arose, the justifications and rituals necessary for the

stability and legitimacy of the rulers. What happened, then, when two legitimacies confronted each other, such as the legitimacy of the king subject to Allāh and the legitimacy – in the same individual – of the master of iron-casting, associated in an ancient alliance with the magician-founders? African political powers faced contradictions, tensions, choices and evolutions as in any other region of the globe. What is probably most striking is the extreme flexibility of the ideological adaptations that reduced contradictions and conflicts, at least as long as the demands of Christianity or Islam did not supervene.

Religion and ideologies treat of the cultural substance. The arts are the expression of that substance. At this level, a distinction is made between two groups of different traditions: the tradition of the *oikumene* and the tradition of the regional arts.

The Muslim world subordinates art to the life of the Islamic community. Collective monuments are, primarily, those where that community meets to pray and perform acts of faith. The mosque is at the centre of Muslim architecture. There do, of course, exist styles that are instantly recognizable and each dynasty endeavoured to put its stamp on its mosques. Neither the Tulunids in Fuṣṭāṭ, nor the Aghlabids in Ḳayrawān, nor the Faṭimids in Mahdiyya or Cairo, nor the Almoravids in Morocco or Spain were exceptions to this rule. But, over and above differences of detail, the mosque proclaimed the unity of the Muslim *umma*.

The aristocracy of government, war or trade developed, in these centuries, a taste for luxury that shows clearly in the production of fabrics, sculpted ivories and wood, ceramics, mosaics and sometimes murals. In this field as in that of architecture, borrowings moved, following fashion, from one continent to another.

The arts of Nubia and Ethiopia, which were more self-contained, although still borrowing from the Mediterranean basin, have been mentioned in this volume. The place occupied by murals in Christian art is in sharp contrast to Muslim practice. The slight influence of the one on the other – of Muslim art on Christian art and vice versa – is worth stressing. It is proof *a contrario* that styles did not spread automatically but followed religious and political lines of force.

It was long thought and written that nothing remained of the visual arts of Africa south of the Sahara, since wood, the preferred material of artistic expression, did not withstand the ravages of time. Recent discoveries have reopened the question. The figurative ceramic art of Nok, whose products were spread over almost a millennium beginning in the seventh century before the Christian era, revealed at one stroke the historical depth of the African artistic past. There was then a tendency to move on directly to the production of Ife, in the twelfth century, Ife being seen as the consequence of Nok. The error lay in believing that not much existed for the period between these two manifestations and that ceramic art was limited to Nigeria. Today, it has become clear that Nok was not a closed entity, that figurative ceramic art was also found beyond it and that, during our period, a plastic art form developed that has been found from Tegdaoust to Jenne-Jenno, in Niger, south of Lake Chad and no doubt elsewhere, notably at Igbo-Ukwu as well. In the present state of research, it is possible to speak of a regional Upper Niger tradition that expressed itself not only in ceramics but in small metal objects and, c. 1100, at Bandiagara, also in wood. It is likely that many other objects in wood were carved at this time but have perished.

Throughout West Africa a figurative art existed using baked clay. This production and the associated techniques were spread over centuries and go back well before the seventh century. Mention must also be made, in passing, to the very fine artistic quality of ceramic vases found at Sintiu-Bara, in Senegal, dated to the sixth century, which can be considered as cultural indicators over a much wider geographical area.

In Central Africa two wooden items, one a helmet mask representing an animal, the other a head on a pot dating from the end of the first millennium, have survived. They at least show that the practice of carving existed in Angola. In East Africa, a few figurines of cattle dating from this period come from the White Nile, and there are also human figurines from Uganda. In Southern Africa, the period of ceramic masks in the Transvaal came to an end *c.* 800. There is perhaps a link here with some gold-covered objects found at Mapungubwe. These objects were certainly the precursors of the stone sculpture that developed later in Zimbabwe. Elsewhere, there were, in our period, clay figurines of cattle and of other domestic animals and female ones at sites of the Leopard's Kopje tradition. They are also found in older sites in Zimbabwe (Gokomere). In central Zambia (Kalomo), similar figurines of the period studied here differ markedly in stylistic terms from those of Zimbabwe. It should not be forgotten, finally, that the very rich rock art in Zimbabwe died out in the eleventh century, while less complex rock art styles continued to exist in Namibia and Southern Africa, no doubt the work of the San.

The spread of stylistic provinces is not yet clear and we have only vague ideas about the role played by these works and their purpose. One day, however, it can be anticipated that some gaps will be filled and that we shall be able to reconstruct a history of the arts of regional traditions.

Conclusion

Five centuries of growing stability, of societies putting down roots, of development in the widest sense of the word. Five centuries marked both by the more coherent exploitation of the environments and by the appearance of Islam, which, in the long run, altered the old balances. Five centuries of unequal development, from which some regions of the continent emerge fully from the documentary shadow and enable us to reconstruct, through patient work and methodological inventiveness, the technical, social, cultural and political changes under way. Five centuries during which, also, some regions remain very inadequately known, which means that we have not done enough work. Central Africa, certainly, was at this time involved in a process of intense socio-political organization: it can be sensed almost everywhere, but too often the evidence is still lacking.

An observer living in 600 could not, even in the broadest outline, have foreseen what Africa would be in 1100. But an observer living in 1100 could have predicted in broad outline what the human situation in the continent would be in 1500 and, on the cultural level, even in 1990. And that is the real significance of the five formative centuries that have been presented in this volume.

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