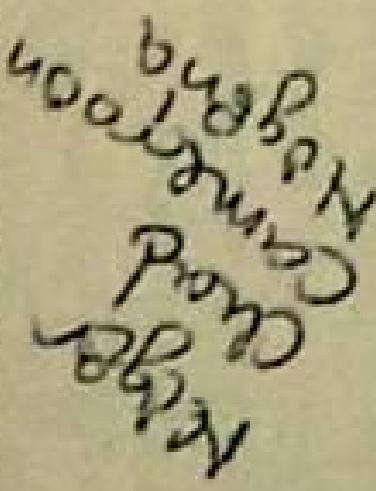


Aboriginal

Chapter I

STATES OF THE CENTRAL SUDAN



The Central Sudan is the region stretching from the Middle Niger to the eastern plains of the Lake Chad basin, and from the Niger-Benue junction to the desert south of Agades. This is the region of savannah and semi-desert in which flourished the great empire of Kanem-Bornu and the city-states of Hausaland.

THE KANEM-BORNU EMPIRE

EARLY HISTORY

There is something very interesting about the Kanem-Bornu empire. It is believed to be one of the oldest kingdoms in the world, having been founded about the eighth century AD and surviving into the twentieth century. This empire flourished in the Lake Chad basin. The Chad basin, according to Dr C. C. Hemesia, "has for long been one of the great crossroads of African culture and history". Its geographical features have for centuries made the movement of people and animals easy in all directions. It became therefore the "melting pot" of several races from whom the Kanuri have emerged as the most dominant group.

The Kanuri who inhabit the Chad basin are descended from a mixture of Negroes, Berber and Arab stock. They founded the great Kanuri empires of Kanem and Bornu east and west of Lake Chad respectively.

THE KANEM-BORNU EMPIRE (c. AD 360-1470)

The first Kanuri state, popularly known as the kingdom of Kanem, existed to the east of Lake Chad in what is now the northern section of the Chad Republic. According to tradition, the kingdom was founded about the eighth century by Salt or Scl, who was probably of Berber origin. The Salt dynasty or the Sais, or kings, which he founded, is believed to be one of the longest in the world (c. AD 800-1346), and certainly the longest in Africa.

Here again, it would be pointless to argue, as some European writers have tried to do, that the Kanem kingdom was not a Negro kingdom because it was founded by a king of Berber extraction. It should be remembered that the Berber immigrants who became the rulers of the country were completely assimilated by the Negro population soon after their settlement in Kanem. The Mais of Kanem established their capital at Njimi. There was considerable contact between Kanem and North Africa. In the eleventh century, about 1090, Mai Ummi Jilmi (c. 1085-97) was converted to Islam. With its acceptance of Islam, Kanem became an influential Muslim state in Central Sudan.

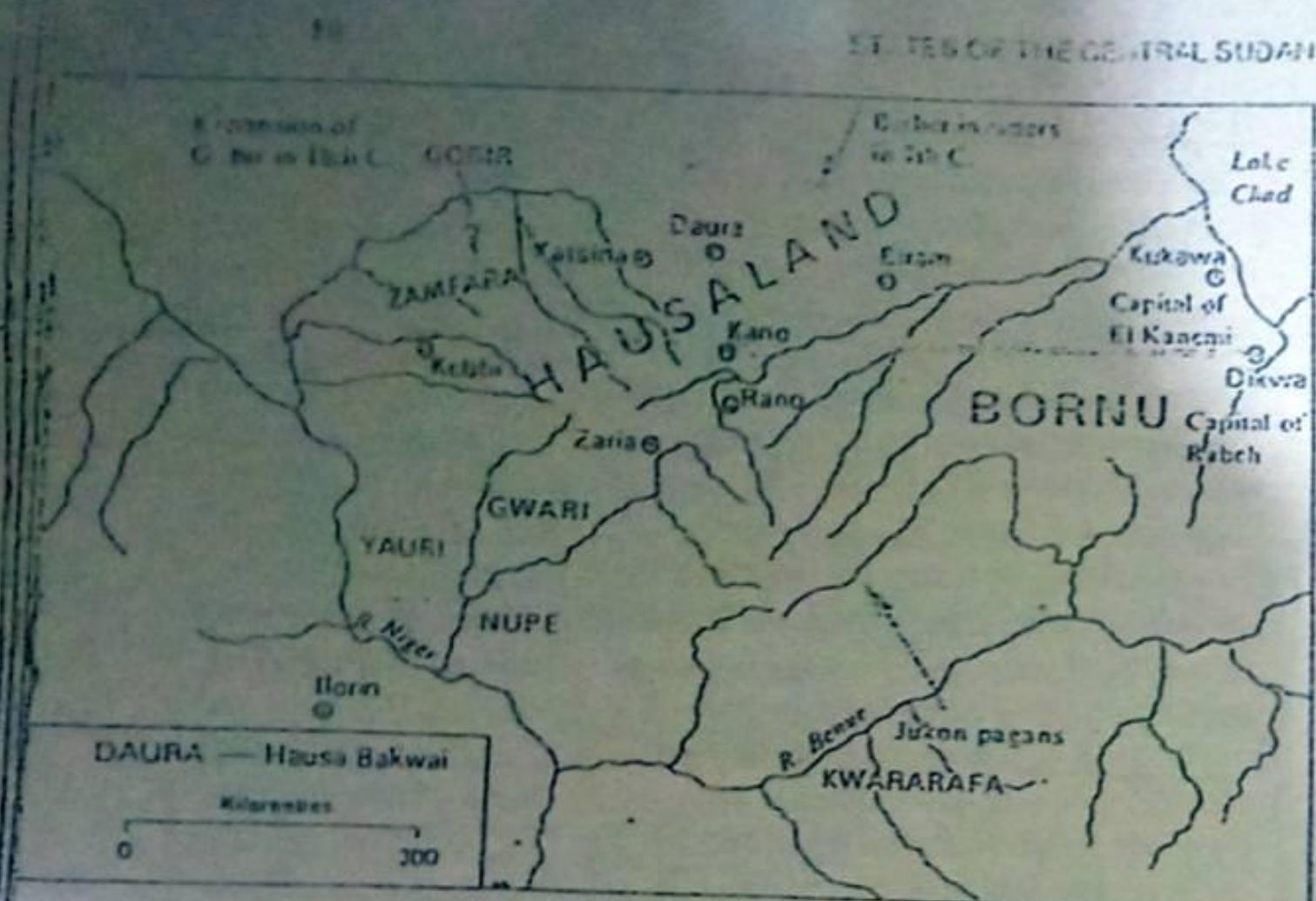
MAI DUNAMA I (1097-1150)

He was the successor and son of Ummi. A powerful king and a devout Muslim, he made three pilgrimages to Mecca. He began the scheme of converting the kingdom into an empire by his conquests.

MAI DUNAMA II (1121-59)

He was an enterprising and warlike king. During his reign, Kanem attained great heights of power and prosperity and its influence was felt in the Sudan and North Africa. Kanem maintained an embassy in Tunis and a hostel in Cairo for Kanem pilgrims and resident students.

Mai Dunama II continued the policy of territorial expansion begun by his predecessor Mai Dunama I. With a cavalry of about 30,000 strong, Mai Dunama II extended the empire to Fezzan in the north, Adamawa in the south, Bornu and Kano in west and



Map VI: The Central Sudan. Hausaland and Bornu

Wadai in the east. The importance of this expansion was that it helped to spread Islam in the Sudan.

Government

During this period, there was a well-established system of government in Kanem. The Mai, or king, was the central authority in the state. He had a council of twelve advisers which exercised considerable control over state policy. There was a class system with the aristocracy at the top and the slaves at the base of the social pyramid. Taxes were levied on the products of the peasants. There were four provinces each under a provincial governor. The most important of these governors were the Yerima who controlled the lands of the Yeri against attacks from the Tuaregs, and the Galadima who controlled the lands of the West. The governorships were always in the hands of members of the royal dynasty.

THE KANEM-BORNU EMPIRE

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The Mai, or Queen Mother, and the senior wife of the Mai exercised great influence in state affairs. There was an army under the control of the Kaigama, or General.

End of the First Kanem-Bornu Empire

From the middle of the thirteenth century, that is, after the reign of Dunama II, the power of the first Kanuri empire was in decline.

- ① One of the factors responsible for this decline was dynastic feuds. The system of entrusting the post of provincial governor to members of the royal family had an inherent weakness. It meant the delegation of great powers to the governors who used them to organise intrigues and revolts against the Mais. These revolts were so frequent, especially in the fourteenth century, that they weakened the central authority, making it incapable of resisting the attacks of external enemies.
- ② The second factor was the menace of external enemies—the So and the Bulala. The struggle with these two peoples was the chief feature of the history of the empire from the middle of the thirteenth century to the end of the fourteenth century. The So, a neighbouring tribe to the east of Kanem, fought for long with the Kanuri and defeated and killed four of their kings in succession. At the same time, another neighbouring tribe to the south-east of Kanem, the Bulala, took advantage of the weakness of the empire and attacked it so effectively that the ruling Sef dynasty was forced to move to Bornu, west of Lake Chad, to found a new state.

THE SECOND KANEM-BORNU EMPIRE (c 1470-1846) *

In the reign of Mai Daud (1366-76) the Bulala attacks were intensified. As a result, Daud was driven from the Kanem capital, Njimi, and finally killed by the Bulala. Then, towards the end of the fourteenth century, Mai Umar ibn Idris (1384-88) was driven out of Kanem by the Bulala, and so transferred his capital to the rich pastoral country of Bornu, west of Lake Chad. Many of his people who were still semi-nomadic followed him to found the second Kanuri empire of Bornu.

* But the new state of Bornu was troubled by hostile tribes and civil strife arising from quarrels among the members of the royal

family. It was nearly a century before the Sai dynasty could re-establish itself in power in Bornu.

Mai Ali Ghaji (1472-1504)

The man who restored power and stability to the dynasty was Ali Ghaji. He was the true founder of the second Kanuri empire of Bornu.

He built a new capital at Ngazargamu. He reformed the government, reducing the excessive powers of the high officers of state whose struggle for power had caused the troubles of the state. In this way, he put an end to the civil wars. He enforced the strict observance of Islamic practices such as reading the Koran and marrying only four wives.

With his efficient government, the Bornu kingdom regained the power which Kanem had lost as a result of the Bulala conquest. He raised a strong royal army with which he maintained internal peace and extended the sway of the kingdom. In the east, he fought the Bulala to a standstill; in the west, he reduced the Hausa states, including Kano, to tribute-paying states; in the north, he extended the kingdom to Borku and Tibesti; and in the south, he halted a Kwaratafa invasion of his state.

Ali Ghaji tried to improve the economy of the new state. He encouraged the trans-Saharan trade by which horses were imported into Bornu and slaves exported. Bornu under him became so important and famous that it appears in contemporary (fifteenth century) Portuguese maps of Africa.

Mai Idris Katakarmabi (1504-26)

He was the son and successor of Ali Ghaji. His greatest achievement was his defeat of the Bulala and reoccupation of Njimi, the old capital of Kanem. Thus, Kanem became a province of the Bornu empire. In the west, Idris attacked the powerful Kanta of Kebbi but did not fare well. It is even said that he continued the tradition of sending an embassy to Tripoli.

Mai Idris Alooma (1571-1603)

He was the greatest of the Mais, and under him Bornu reached the peak of its power and prosperity.

Alooma's first task was his expansion and unification of the

empire. Soon after his accession, he imported firearms and Turkish mercenaries from Tripoli. He thus became the first ruler to use firearms in the Sudan. You will remember that guns were unknown in the Western Sudan until the Moorish invasion in 1590. The use of firearms and cavalry in armour made his army invincible in battle.

Thus equipped, he subdued the So tribesmen on the borders of the kingdom. Then he conquered Kano city and province in the west, the Tuaregs of Air and Agades in the north, and defeated the pagans of Mandara in the south. He brought the troublesome Bulala of Kanem under control and finally exercised dominion as far east as Wadai. He thus completed the unification of the empire.

Government of the Empire

The government of the empire under Idris Alooma was similar to that of Kanem with a few modifications. The central administration still consisted of the Mai and a Council of Twelve among whom the principal offices of the state were divided. The councillors were chosen from members of the royal family and also from among great nobles.

Each councillor was appointed for life and exercised authority over a particular territory. The most important councillors were, as in Kanem, the Kaigama (Commander-in-Chief and Warden of the South); the Yerima (Warden of the North); the Mestrema (Warden of the East) and the Galadima (Warden of the West). The Galadima, whose station was at Nguru, was a powerful officer. All the councillors except the Galadima lived in the capital so that the king could keep a close watch over them. They only visited their districts in times of trouble or to ensure that taxes were collected.

The actual administration of the provinces was carried on by governors chosen from slaves or humble families who were truly loyal to the Mai. This was to prevent the development of intrigues and revolts which were common in Kanem when the governorships were held by members of the royal family.

The Magira, or Queen Mother, still exercised great influence in the state. So did the Megara, the king's official "elder sister", and the Gumisu, or the first-wife of the king.

Like his predecessor Idris Alooma established a proper judicial system based on Muslim law and enforced by kadis, or judges. The Majim Kewendi, or Chief Judge, and twelve other judges formed the high court which was held in the capital. A scribe or keeper of records of the high court was next in importance to the Chief Judge. These judges advised the king on legal and religious matters. In the large towns local mullams acted as judges. From the local courts, appeals were sent to the high court at the capital.

For military purposes, the empire was divided into four regions on the same lines as its political organisation. The regions were under the four military leaders—the Kaigama, the Yerima, the Mesiema and the Galadima as mentioned above. Each of these leaders had under him subordinate commanders in charge of the General's division of the army. There was a standing army which served as the king's bodyguard.

Economy of the Empire

The revenue of the government came principally from taxes and tribute. Provincial governors collected taxes on the livestock and harvests of their peasant subjects. Taxes were paid in kind or in the currency of the period. It appears that in the seventeenth century, when cowries were commonly used as currency, taxes were paid in cowries. Vassal states paid tribute.

Trade was very important in the economy of the empire. Trade was carried on with North Africa and the Desert, the Western and Central Sudan and with the forest region to the south. Bornu exported grain to Bilma in the desert and imported salt in exchange. Natron, or potash, from Lake Chad was exported to Kang from where it was distributed over the Sudan. Copper was also exported. Kola nuts were imported from the south. A very profitable trade in slaves, especially eunuchs, was carried on with North Africa—Cairo, Tripoli and Tunis—and firearms were imported from there.

Cultural Growth

Idris Alooma found time to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca and came back equipped with ideas for the cultural revolution of the

state. He determined to convert his people to Islam, so he built many mosques and a hostel for Bornu pilgrims in Mecca. He succeeded in making Islam the state religion. He replaced customary law with Muslim law, or Sharia, which was administered by Muslim judges.

He was also interested in education and encouraged it by building many schools.

Idris Alooma died in 1603 in the same year as his contemporary, Queen Elizabeth I of England, died. Like her reign in England, Idris Alooma's reign is remarkable in the history of Bornu. He left the empire strong and united and gave it an efficient system of administration which lasted until the nineteenth century.

Decline of the Empire

After Idris Alooma, the second Kanuti empire appears to have fallen into the hands of incompetent successors. Consequently, Bornu began a long period of two centuries of slow decline. Although its influence was still considerable over a wide area round the Chad basin, by the eighteenth century it had lost its former power. But it recovered under Mohammed El Kaneini in the nineteenth century, which we shall deal with in Book Two. Meanwhile, we shall examine the causes of the decline which followed Idris Alooma's death.

Firstly, there appears to have been a deterioration of the military machine following the long period of peace which prevailed for most of the seventeenth century. The empire had reached its greatest extent under Alooma and there were no more wars of expansion. Alooma's efficient administration ensured internal peace. So the army fell into decline as a result of inactivity. By the closing years of the eighteenth century, the army was notoriously ineffective. Thus, when Mai Ahmad (1793–1810) led an expedition against the Mandara, he lost most of his army.

Secondly, forty years after Idris Alooma, during the reign of Mai Ali (1657–94), the state began to weaken under attacks from the Tuaregs from the north and the Kwararafa of the Jukun kingdom in the south. These attacks upset trade and agriculture and famines were frequent in Bornu.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Bornu was so weak

conquest of outlying territory. Thus, the chief of the capital town became the *Sarki*, or king of the state, while the heads of absorbed villages became subordinate chiefs.

Religion played an important role in the political life of all states. The political power of the king was based on it, for he was not only the secular head of the state but also the chief priest of the town's deities. Religion provided spiritual bonds which strengthened the political unity of the state. With the advent of Islam from the fifteenth century onwards, the Muslim system of government and law was adopted by the ruling class of all the Hausa states.

Under this system, each state was governed by the *Sarki*, or king, with the help of a council of ministers and territorial officials drawn from the hereditary aristocracy. Though the king enjoyed immense powers, his powers were actually limited, for he could not act without the approval of this council of influential nobles. Mohammed Rimfa of Kano had to offer titles to eunuchs and slaves as a means of checking the power of this hereditary nobility.

Among the important officials of the central government drawn from this class were the following. The *Galadima* was a high official of the royal council. In Zaria, he looked after the town when the king and other chiefs went to war. The *Madaivaki*, or commander-in-chief of the army, was next in importance to the king. He advised the king on the appointment or dismissal of the title holders, replied to the king's address on ceremonial occasions, summoned meetings of chief councillors, and with them chose a new king when the office was vacant. In some states, the *Waziri*, or Chief Minister, performed the same functions. There were also the *Magaji*, or Lord of the Treasury; the *Yari*, or Head Gaoler; the *Sarkin Dogarai*, or Head of the King's Bodyguard; and the *Sarkin Yan Doka*, or Chief of the Police, who took charge of prisoners charged with serious offences, inflicted corporal punishment and acted as the town crier and watchman.

Each state was divided into villages and districts for purposes of local government. Local administration was carried out through village and district heads appointed by the king, usually from the traditional rulers of the area, or sometimes from members of his own or other important families. They enforced the orders of the king in their locality and collected taxes. Each village or district

head had a representative in the capital through whom he reported events in the locality to the king. The government of the Hausa states was, as you can see, highly centralized, with the king exercising overall control over every department of administration.

Judicial Administration

Before the introduction of Islam, justice was administered in the capital town by the *Sarki* and outside it by the village or district heads. With the adoption of Islam, the Muslim judicial system was introduced. The king was the supreme judge of the state. He gave the final decision in important cases concerning land, murder and manslaughter, but usually with the advice of the Chief Alkali and his jury of legal experts.

Lesser judicial matters were settled by the Alkali and his jury. In all cases, the *Maliki* code of Muslim law was applied. In the districts, there were local courts from which appeals could be sent to the Chief Alkali's court at the capital. In smaller villages, the village head exercised judicial authority for minor offences.

Taxation

Originally, taxation was in the form of tribute in grain and other local products. But with the adoption of Islam, the Muslim tax system was introduced. The chief taxes under this system consisted of a tax on income, a tax on livestock; a land tax; and a capitation tax levied on conquered peoples and usually paid in slaves. Taxes were also levied on such professions as those of craftsmen, butchers, dyers and prostitutes. Revenue came also from taxes on luxury goods such as tobacco, onions and sugar cane, and from market fees and tolls on caravan routes.

ECONOMY OF THE HAUSA STATES

Agriculture was the main occupation of the peasant class in most of the Hausa states, and a high degree of agricultural skill was attained.

But the main importance of the Hausa states in West Africa before the nineteenth century and even after lay in trade and

industry. The towns were busy centres of manufacture. There were iron deposits around Fune and Kano, and so the metal industry was developed in these towns. Other industries were cloth weaving from local cotton, dying and leather work.

Trade flourished between the Hausa states and other West African states as well as across the Sahara to North Africa. The main exports to North Africa were cloth, ironwork, woodwork and slaves, and in return such articles as armour, arms and books were imported. The introduction of the camel into Hausaland about 1440 encouraged this trans-Saharan trade. With the collapse of the Songhai empire after the Moroccan conquest, the main stream of trans-Saharan trade was diverted to Hausaland. Consequently, Katsina and Kano acquired great importance, fame and wealth as leading trading centres in the Sudan. From the south, kola nuts were imported into Kano and distributed over the Sudan. Thus, Hausa merchants travelled widely all over the Sudan and the semi-desert belt, and Hausa became the common language of trade.

DEFENCE OF THE HAUSA STATES

The Hausa states were militarily weak, generally speaking, for they never built empires. They were never politically united. Rather they remained selfish, largely independent and were often fighting among themselves. Thus, their military system was orientated more towards the defensive than the offensive.

The town was usually surrounded by long, huge mud walls. The outer walls of Kano which have lasted about 400 years measure ten to seventeen metres high and eighteen kilometres long. The walls enclose some farm land. In times of attack, the people in the surrounding villages took refuge in the city where they would be safe and not go hungry.

This lack of unity among the Hausa states was a source of great weakness. It exposed them to conquest by other Sudanese states at various times. In 1513, Askia the Great conquered Kano, Zaria and Katsina. Similarly, later in the sixteenth century, the Muis of Bornu extended their sway over Hausaland, and most Hausa states paid tribute to Bornu. Then early in the nineteenth century, the rule of the Hausa kings was overthrown during the Fulani

THE HAUSA STATES

piped, and Fulani units and aristocracy became the *new élite* of the Hausa states. You will read about this in another chapter of this book. In the mean time, let us look at the *brief history* of some of the more important of the Hausa states before the nineteenth century.

BRIEF HISTORY OF SOME HAUSA STATES

Kano

The city of Kano started as a small settlement at the hill of Dalla. Here iron ore was plentiful and the settlers engaged in blacksmithing. The first recorded king of Kano was Bagoda, the grandson of Abuyazidu. He lived about AD 1000. After him forty-eight kings ruled. Much of our knowledge of early Kano comes from the *Kano Chronicle*, written about 1890 by Sir Richmond Palmer.

The first walls of Kano city were built about the twelfth century and they did not enclose a large area as Kano was still a small village. It is not certain when the city began to expand, but the process must have been a very slow and gradual one.

Kano remained a pagan state until the reign of Sarki Yaji (1349–1385) when Muslim scholars from Mali brought Islam to the city-state in the fourteenth century. But King Kanageji (1390–1410) reverted to the old pagan ways. It is said that this man conquered Zaria. He also introduced the metal helmet and armour from North Africa and Palestine. During the reign of Yakubu (1452–63) more scholars from Mali, which was now in decline, came to Kano.

It was in the reign of Mohammed Rimfa (1463–93) that Kano reached the apogee of its fame and greatness. During this reign Kano made a great advance in Muslim religion and civilisation. Muslim missionaries came from Egypt, new mosques were built, oriental habits were introduced and the *Ramadan* fast was observed for the first time. Rimfa divided Kano into areas for administrative convenience, and enclosed the city, which was now very large, with new walls having seven gates. He kept the rising power of Katsina in check and defeated Zaria in battle.

The reign of Mohammed Kisoki (1509–65) marked the beginning of the decline of Kano. It saw the conquest of Kano by Askia

the Great, Kissa, it is said, married the ruler's daughter and paid tribute to him as his vassal.

In the reign of Ibrahim of Zaria (1582-1618), the Kwararafa conquered Kano. From now on Kano lost its independence and paid tribute first to the Kwararafa and then to Bornu until about 1500. Leo Africanus who visited Kano as well as Katsina, Zaria and Zaria in 1526, remarked on the decline of Kano in the sixteenth century. He wrote: "The inhabitants are rich merchants and most civil people. Their king as in times past of great puissance, and he had mighty troops of horsemen at his command, but he has since been constrained to pay tribute to the kings of Zaria and Katsina."

During the eighteenth century, Kano was involved in desperate struggles with Gobir and Zamfara, the former defeating it about 1770. These conquests did not, however, affect the internal government of Kano state.

Katsina

Katsina is said to have been founded by Kumayo, a son of Bawo, probably in the twelfth century. He established a dynasty which lasted till the fifteenth century, when the reigning king Samau was overthrown by a man called Kwarau, who founded a new dynasty.

Kwarau's successor was converted to Islam about 1493 by the celebrated Muslim missionary Al-Maghili of Egypt. Gradually the new religion spread through the state and took root. Other Muslim teachers, notably two scholars of Sankore University, visited Katsina and one of them settled there and was made a judge.

Katsina became a very prosperous state owing to its position as the southern terminus of the caravan route from Tripoli and Tunis through Ghadames, Ghat, Air and Agades, and also because of its role in the trans-Saharan trade. From the sixteenth century, Katsina was subservient to other Sudanese states. In 1512 and in 1554, the Askias of Songhai raided Katsina. It was often at war with Kano till 1650. The Kwararafa invaded the state in 1672 but did not conquer it. Furthermore, Katsina became a vassal state of Bornu.

The eighteenth century was however a period of resurgence for

Katsina as a result of the fall of the Songhai empire and the decline of Bornu. The state enjoyed its time of greatest prosperity as the leading city of the Central Sudans in commerce and culture. It is said that Katsina, now a large city, was divided into a number of sections, one belonging to students. It became no doubt, a centre of Islamic learning and culture. Finally, Katsina had been built towards the end of the century, the people of Gobir attacked Katsina and greatly interested with its trade and prosperity.

Zaria

Zaria is the capital town of Zauzau, the most southerly of the Hausa Bakwai states. The state is now more popularly known by the name of Zaria.

The first recorded ruler of the state was Gunguma, also a son of Bawo. He is supposed to have reigned about 1380. According to tradition, Zaria achieved great power and influence in Hausaland during the fifteenth century under its Queen Amina. The *Kano Chronicle* records: "At this time, Zaria, under Queen Amina, conquered all the towns as far as Kwararafa and Nupe. Every town paid tribute to her. The Sarkin Nupe sent forty eunuchs and ten thousand kolas to her. She first had eunuchs and kolas in Hausaland. Her conquest extended over thirty-four years. In her time, the whole of the products of the west (from Zaria) were brought to Hausaland."

It is claimed she built great fortified walls all over Hausaland and that she extended her sway over most of the Hausa states. All over Hausaland, ancient town walls are called *gawawa Amina* (Amina's wall).

Zaria, as the most southerly of the Hausa states, was the chief supplier of slaves for the markets of Kano and Katsina where they were bought up by Arab merchants.

It is recorded that the ascendancy of Zaria in Hausaland came to an end early in the eighteenth century when Zaria was conquered by Bornu and paid tribute to it as did other Hausa states.

Kebbi

Kebbi was one of the Hausa "bastard" states and the furthest west of the states of Hausaland. We do not hear much of Kebbi in

QUESTIONS

- The history of the Hausa states until the reign of Kotol Kanta—the greatest ruler of Hausaland in the sixteenth century.
- Askia the Great, your wali waneembe, had brought Kebbi under the Songhai empire and Kanta was his governor for Kebbi. Kanta had assisted the Askia in his campaign against Aïr. Having quarrelled with his master over the booty won in this campaign, Kanta led a successful revolt against the Songhai king in 1515–16 and set up an independent kingdom of Kebbi. Defying all efforts by the Askia's forces to recover Kebbi, Kanta proceeded to reduce much of Hausaland to his authority. Thus Katsina, Kano, Gobir, Zaria and the Nupe country came under his conquering hand.
- Bornu, now fearing the growing power of Kebbi, attacked it but was defeated. Twelve years later, Mai Idris Aloma of Bornu (1504–26) tried again to capture it, but was also humiliated. It is said that Kanta pursued the retreating Bornu army and inflicted a heavy defeat on it at Nguru. On his way back, however, he was fatally wounded while trying to crush a revolt in Katsina, and died on his way home. His people are said to have embalmed his body, probably over a smoke fire, and buried it at Surame, his new capital.
- Kanta was a great general. He was in many ways, with the possible exception of Usuman dan Fodio, the greatest individual produced by the Hausa states. He built the great fortress called Gungu on the Argungu-Sokoto road for his troops. He made a copper canoe for travelling along the River Sokoto to inspect the southern part of his domains in the rainy season when the roads usually became impassable owing to floods.
- Like the Askias, his name became the title of the chiefs of Kebbi who ruled after him. As Dr C. C. Ifemesia comments, "Kanta's was the only attempt in his time and for long afterwards to build an empire in Hausaland comparable to those of Songhai to the west and Bornu to the east." After Kanta, there were twenty-nine chieftains of Kebbi. When the Moors invaded the Songhai empire, Askia Ishaq II fled to Kebbi, but was refused shelter by the Kanta of the day. About 1715, the capital of Kebbi was moved from Sutame to Birnin Kebbi by Kanta Tomo. It remained the capital until the Fulani rising. The present Emirs of Argungu are the direct descendants of the great Kanta according to C. R. Niven.

ISLAM IN WEST AFRICA

In the foregoing chapters, you have come across many references to Islam. I have made mention of its introduction into each of the Sudanese states whose history we have already studied. I have described the part which it played in the rise of the great Songhai empire. In this chapter, I intend to give you an idea of the origin and nature of this great religion and how it reached West Africa and spread there.

THE ORIGIN OF ISLAM

The founder of the religion of Islam was Mohammed, who was born in Mecca in Arabia in AD 570. He lost his parents at a very early age and was brought up by an uncle. During this time, he took part in several trading expeditions to Syria. Later, when his uncle died, he entered the service of a rich widow, Khadija, as a camel-driver. At twenty-five years of age, Mohammed married Khadija, who was fifteen years older than himself, and managed her trading business. During his journeys to Syria, he came into contact with Christianity and Judaism and began to compare these religions with the primitive pagan beliefs of the Arabs who at this time, worshipped idols, most notably the Black Stone of the Ka'aba.

When he was about forty, Mohammed began to see his mission as that of a prophet and preacher. He now often withdrew into complete retirement, spending his time in prayer, meditation and fasting. After a series of what he believed to be spiritual revelations, he was convinced that he had been called upon by God to regenerate his people by means of a new religion. This religion he

HOW ISLAM CAME TO MECCA

called "Islam" meaning "submission to God". He began to preach Islam among his people of Mecca.

At first the people of Mecca were hostile to Mohammed and his teaching. So in AD 622, he fled to Medina where large crowds of followers soon gathered round him. When he felt sufficiently strong, he invaded Mecca and conquered it in AD 630, and before long the whole of Arabia was under his religious and military sway.

Mohammed's Islamic teaching consists briefly of belief in one supreme God and in Mohammed as His Prophet, the existence of Angels, life after death, Heaven and Hell, and in predestination. The practical devotions consist of daily recital of the creed, five times, praying, fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, almsgiving, pilgrimage to Mecca and jihad, that is, the conversion of infidels by peace or conquest.

The spread of Islam began with Mohammed's capture of Mecca in AD 630. After his death in AD 632, his successors conquered and converted to Islam Persia, Syria, North Africa and Spain. Islam later spread to India, China and West Africa. Today, the Muslim population of the world is about 400 000 000.

1.8 billion.

HOW ISLAM CAME TO WEST AFRICA

Between the conquest of Egypt in AD 641 and Morocco in AD 680, North Africa was occupied and converted by the Arabs. From here, Islam spread gradually into the Sudan. It followed two distinct routes, namely, the western route along the Atlantic coast to Senegal, then eastwards across the states of the Western Sudan to Hausaland; and the eastern route from Tripoli and Egypt across the desert to Bornu.

Two factors were responsible for the spread of Islam to West Africa.

TRADE

The first was trade. The conquest of North Africa gave a strong impetus to the trans-Saharan trade which, as we have seen, had

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(Continued from page 113) The attraction of gold drew the Muslim Berber and Arab merchants of North-West Africa to the Sudan in ever increasing numbers. Consequently, large Muslim communities grew up in the market towns of the Western Sudan such as Audogast and Ghana, Timbuktu, Jenne and Kukia a little to the south of modern Gao. The Spanish Muslim geographer Al-Bakri tells us that the city of Ghana in 1067 consisted of two towns, one of which was inhabited by Muslims. This city was evidently inhabited by Arab and Berber merchants from North Africa. The Muslim traders from North-West Africa became the agents for the spread of Islam in the Sudan.

② THE ALMORAVIDS

The second factor was the Almoravid conquest of the Western Sudan. The Almoravids, or *Al Murabitin*, were a fanatical sect of Muslims which sprang up in an island in the Senegal river in the eleventh century. Their original leader was a learned Muslim preacher from North Africa called Abdullah ibn Yasin. When he started to preach among the Goddala—a pagan tribe in the Senegal river area, he was strongly opposed. So Abdullah retired to a fortified retreat on an island in the Senegal river. This formed the recruiting base for his fanatical Muslim followers. When they were ready the Almoravids (as they were later called by European writers instead of *Al-Murabitin*) launched a militant reforming movement aimed at conquering and converting to Islam the pagan peoples of the Sudan. Thus, the Sudan witnessed the first jihad in West African history. You will remember that in 1076 the Almoravids under their leader Abu Bekir conquered Ghana, as a result of which the empire broke up.

THE SPREAD OF ISLAM IN WEST AFRICA

GHANA

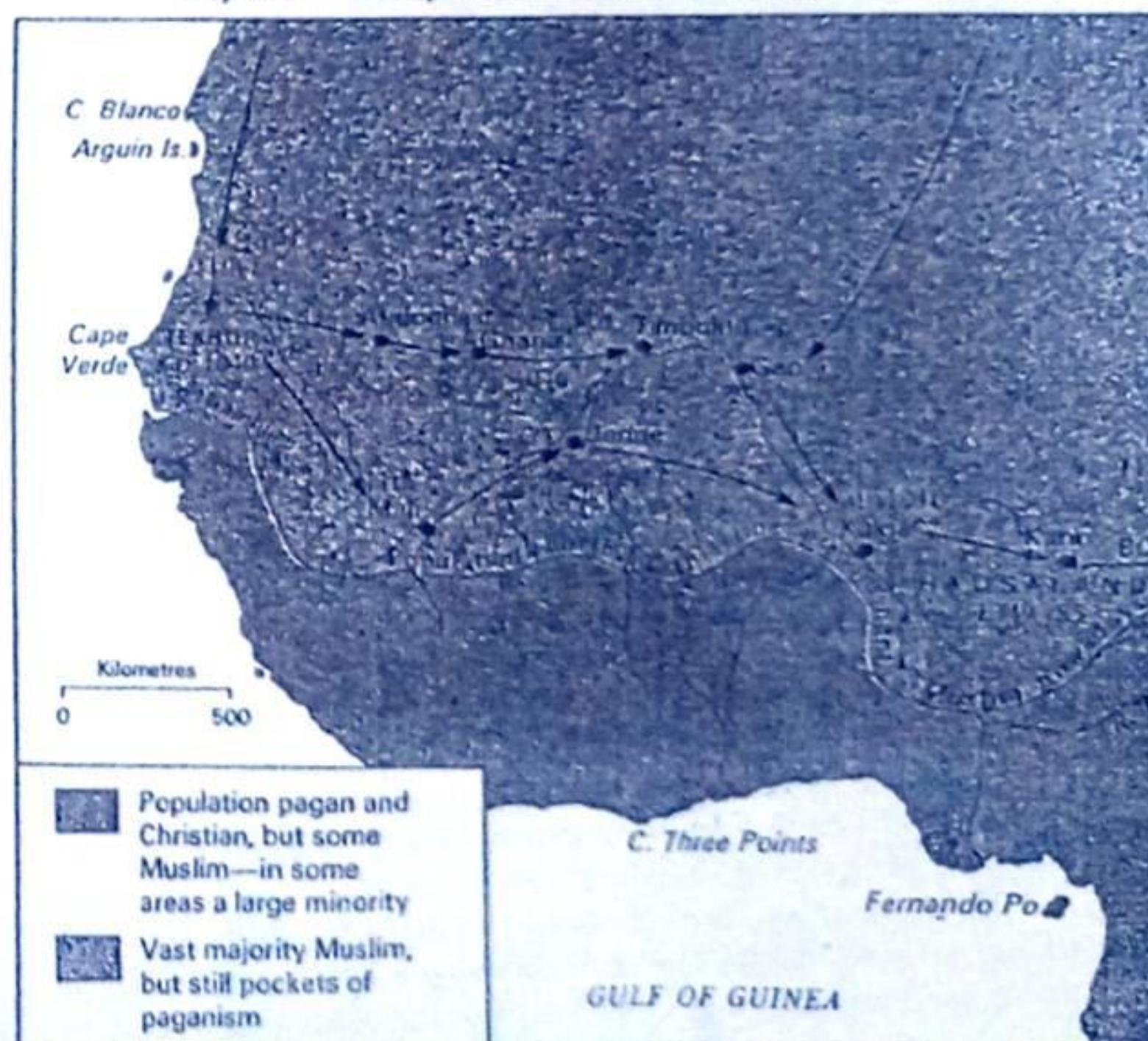
From about 1042, the Almoravids began to attack the northern frontiers of the Ghana empire. In 1055, they recaptured Audogast which was a vassal state of the Ghana empire and converted

the inhabitants to Islam. With Audogast as their base, the Almoravids, under their leader Abu Bekir, captured Kumbi Saleh, the capital of Ghana, in 1076. Though Ghana regained its independence in 1088, the kingdom remained Islamic from then on, and the Muslims of Ghana spread Islam amongst the many peoples over whom they still held sway.

MALI

About 1050, at the time of the Almoravid conquest of the Ghana empire, Baramendana, the ruler of the small Mandingo state of Kangaba was converted to Islam. His successors kept up

Map VIII: The Spread of Islam in West Africa



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ISLAM IN WEST AFRICA
Islam reached the West African states through trade. You will have seen that under Sundiata Keita, the greatest ruler of Mali, made a costly and colourful pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324-25. He brought home Muslim scholars, built mosques and began the practice of Friday congregational prayers.

JENNE - Isha C

The king of Jenne was converted to Islam about AD 1200 and soon his subjects followed his example. Jenne from then on became the greatest Muslim metropolis in the Western Sudan.

TIMBUKTU Isha C

The town of Timbuktu was founded about AD 1096 as a Berber settlement. It soon became a great commercial and Islamic centre. Because of its advantageous position, Muslim traders from Jenne and North Africa began to make use of it for the trans-Saharan trade. You have learnt that Mansa Musa of Mali captured Timbuktu in the fourteenth century and built a famous mosque there. The city of Timbuktu was to reach its zenith as the leading centre of Muslim education and culture in the reign of Askia the Great (1498-1528).

SONGHAI Isha C

In the eleventh century, Islam spread to the Songhai. About AD 1010, Za Kossi, the fifteenth king of the Za dynasty, became a Muslim, probably through the influence of Muslim traders from North Africa. It was this ruler who moved the Songhai capital from Kukia to Gao.

Under Sonni Ali (1464-1492), the two great Islamic centres of the Western Sudan, Timbuktu and Jenne, were incorporated into the Songhai empire. Sonni Ali was not a keen Muslim, and during his reign, Islam suffered a decline in the empire, especially at Timbuktu. It was Askia Mohammed Toure (1498-1528) who restored Islam and made it a state religion. He carried out many campaigns aimed at the expansion of Islam in the Sudan.

KANEM-BORNU

We learnt earlier in this book that from early times there was considerable contact through trade between Kanem-Bornu and Egypt, Tunis and Tripoli. It is therefore very probable that Islam came to Kanem-Bornu from Egypt. About 1090, Mai Ummi Jilmi (c. 1085-97) was converted to Islam along with many of his subjects. Under his Muslim successors, Kanem became a great Muslim state in close touch with North Africa and Arabia.

When the Sef dynasty went over to Bornu after the Bulala conquest of Kanem, the Mais continued the Islamic tradition of the state. Kanem-Bornu reached its apogee as a great Muslim state under Mai Idris Alooma (1571-1603). After his pilgrimage to Mecca, he launched a policy of expansion and complete conversion of the empire. Bornu remained a strong Islamic state right into the nineteenth century.

HAUSALAND

This has already been discussed in the history of the Hausa states (Chapter 5). Here we need only repeat briefly that according to the *Kano Chronicle*, Islam was introduced into Kano between 1349 and 1385, during the reign of Sarki (king) Yaji Ali (1349-85). It was brought here by Muslim scholars from Mali. The ruler of Katsina was converted to Islam about 1493 by the famous missionary Al-Maghili of Algeria. Later, Muslim scholars from Sankore University visited Katsina.

The conversion of Hausaland was a little different from that of the states of the Western Sudan. It was not by conquest. It was due to the willing acceptance of Islamic teaching by the people from better educated persons.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this section, the following observations should be noted.

It must be pointed out that Islam did not take a deep root in the above Sudanese states and was not generally accepted until the nineteenth century. In general, Islam made little or no impact

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traditional religious beliefs and practices even though Islam was the state religion. Islam remained mostly the religion of the trading class and the royal courts. Even among the rulers themselves, the practice of Islam was still imperfect; pagan practices were still retained and there were frequent relapses into paganism. This situation remained unchanged until the Islamic movements of the nineteenth century.

Secondly, the principal method by which Islam spread in West Africa before the nineteenth century was by means of the peaceful settlement of Muslim merchants in the large cities of the Western and Central Sudan. These cities were usually the seats of government. Because of their literacy and knowledge of Arabic, these merchants not only carried out their commercial activities but also became advisers to the kings and their courtiers. In time, the religion of these educated merchants with their wider knowledge of the world, would begin to interest the rulers and their courts. Eventually, conversion to Islam followed, first of the ruler and his courtiers and household, and gradually his subjects.

Islam made little if any headway outside the savannah belt of West Africa until the nineteenth century. It made no progress among the Gurma and Mossi, and apart from a few places revealed by recent research, it did not penetrate the forest region.

IMPORTANCE OF THE COMING OF ISLAM TO WEST AFRICA

One of the greatest events in the history of West Africa was the introduction of the Islamic religion in the Sudan. It is as important as the coming of Christianity to the forest belt of the south, for both religions have had a tremendous influence on the peoples of West Africa. Islam brought about a complete change in the cultural, political and economic life of the peoples of the Sudan.

Firstly, the advent of Islam meant much closer contact across the Sahara between the Arab world of North Africa and Arabia and the Negro world of West Africa. This meant the spread of Muslim culture with its civilising influences, the most important perhaps being the introduction of Arabic writing and language. It

brought to West Africa the benefits of Arabic learning. For instance, what we have learnt in previous chapters about the Sudanese kingdoms before the nineteenth century comes mainly from books written by Arab geographers or Negro scholars writing in the Arabic language.

Of greater significance is the fact that Islam and the Arabic language gave a cultural unity to the Sudan which has remained to this day. Muslim culture is the fundamental reason for the difference between the peoples of the savannah belt and the forest belt of West Africa today.

It must be emphasised that Islam is not just a religious creed. It goes further than this. Islamic law as contained in the Koran regulates every aspect of life of Muslim communities. According to J. O. Hunwick, the Koran is "a book of law and precept, regulating the eating and drinking habits of believers, containing laws of marriage, divorce and inheritance and establishing a political community based on adherence to Islam which cuts across clan, family, tribal and ethnic groupings". The introduction of Islam into the Sudan, therefore, gave rise to the growth of states based on the Muslim system of government and law. Similarly, the introduction of Arabic writing and language was also politically important. It made possible the growth of larger states run with efficient and systematic methods of government because written records could be kept and written messages could easily be sent to the governors of provinces.

Of the political importance of Islam in the Sudan, Mohammed Al-Maghili's book *The Obligations of Princes* is specially significant. This treatise on government was written by this famous Muslim scholar and preacher for the king of Kano in the early sixteenth century. E. W. Bovill says that the book "reveals high ideals and the writer's keen appreciation of the practical difficulties of government". It can therefore be seen that Islam helped the rulers of the Sudanese states to solve their many practical problems of government.

Islam was also of great commercial significance to the Sudanese kingdoms before the nineteenth century. Although trade existed between North Africa and the Sudan before the coming of Islam, its introduction into West Africa strengthened the economic ties between the Muslim peoples on both sides of the Sahara desert.

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THE MOSSI, JUKUN AND NUPE STATES

4. Write a brief account of the early history and internal organisation of the Mossi states. (Nov. 1970)
5. Outline, up to the end of the sixteenth century, the important features of the history of the Mossi states. (June 1974)
6. Trace the origin and growth of the Mossi or Mole-Dagbani states. (Nov. 1977)
7. Why do you consider the Mossi states of special importance in the history of West Africa before the nineteenth century?
8. Give a brief account of the rise to power and decline of the Jukun empire.
9. The Mossi and the Jukun have striking similarities in many respects in their history. Discuss these similarities.
10. Write a brief account of Nupe history before the nineteenth century.

THE FOREST STATES

(I) The Oyo Empire

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

You have learnt in previous chapters the brief history of the ancient Muslim empires and states of the Western and Central Sudan and of the powerful pagan states which grew up immediately to the south of them. As you know, these states existed in the savannah belt of West Africa. In this and the three following chapters, you will learn something of the great states of the pure Negroes. These flourished in the forest region of West Africa, hence they are popularly called "Forest States". The most notable of them were Oyo, Benin, Dahomey and Ashanti. These kingdoms were comparable in size, power and organisation to the great empires of the Western Sudan.

Before beginning the interesting story of these forest kingdoms, I would like to correct certain misconceptions created by some European historians who wish to perpetuate the myth that the Negroes are incapable of originating anything themselves. One aspect of this myth is that which attributes the rise and expansion of these states to the coastal slave trade with Europeans which began in the sixteenth century. The main stimulus to the expansion of these states, they argue, was the desire for direct participation in the coastal slave trade.

This is indeed a wrong deduction and generalisation. When the European trade with the peoples of the Guinea coast began towards the end of the fifteenth century, Oyo and Benin were already powerful and extensive states. It will be made evident in the course of these chapters that the rise of the forest states was

due more to the interplay of local political factors than to the external influence of the slave trade.

Again, the "slave trade" theory discountenances the existence of the concept of divine monarchy that stemmed from Ife in the case of Oyo and Benin, or the idea behind the "Golden Stool" in the case of Ashanti. These were concepts on which an extensive and powerful political organisation could be built as in the Mossi, Jukun and Nupe states.

The second aspect of this myth is that which claims that the peoples of these states were taught the rudiments of political organisation by some immigrants from the savannah region. This is the usual subtle attempt by some European writers to attribute any Negro achievement in art or political advancement to some "external influence" from across the Sahara or from Europe. It should be remembered that the forest people were never conquered by the Sudanese empires. And since the source of any external influence on the political organisation of these states has not so far been traced, it must be assumed that their political development was a completely indigenous political evolution. As Crowder concludes in his book *The Story of Nigeria*, "What is remarkable about Benin and indeed Oyo, is that both of them were purely African states, whose growth was stimulated neither by contact with Islam nor Europe." The same is true of Ashanti and Dahomey to some extent.

The Oyo Empire

EARLY HISTORY

The Oyo state of the Yoruba was the earliest and the largest of the four great forest kingdoms of West Africa. At present, very little is known about the early history of this state. The little that is known is gleaned mostly from Yoruba legends and traditions.

According to some of these traditions, Oduduwa, the chief ancestor and first king of the Yoruba, settled at Ile Ife. His eldest son and successor, Okanbi, died at Ile Ife leaving seven children:

EARLY HISTORY

the first was a daughter, the mother of Olowu, the ancestor of the Owo; the second, also a daughter, was the mother of Alakelu, the founder of Ketu; the third became the king of Benin; the fourth, Orangun, became the king of Ila; the fifth, Onisabe, became the chief of the Sabe; the sixth, Olupopo, became the chief of the Popo; and the seventh, Oranmiyan, became the founder and first Alafin of Oyo. These were the founders and first Obas of Yorubaland.

Oranmiyan, as the story goes, set out with an army to conquer the tribes to the north of Ile Ife. It appears he was the most warlike of the sons of Okanbi. He left a relation, Adimu, at Ile Ife to look after the sacred shrine of the gods. Oranmiyan was not successful in this expedition, and instead of returning to Ile Ife in disgrace, he founded a city at Oyo Ajaka (Old Oyo) where he and his army settled. This tradition was followed by later Oyo generals whose military expeditions proved a failure. Mr Peter Morton-Williams suggests that Oyo was founded between 1388 and 1438.

Speculations are rife as to why Oranmiyan chose Old Oyo as his capital. Perhaps he chose it because its situation in the savannah was suitable for movement of cavalry on which his military power depended, and because it was strategically placed to defend the new kingdom against attacks by the Nupe and Borgu. Perhaps again, he wanted to exploit its situation along the trade route from the south to the north.

However, it came to be that Oranmiyan, as the Alafin of Oyo, and his descendants were accepted by the people of Ife as the military rulers of Yorubaland while Adimu and his descendants became known as "Oni", and were accepted by the people of Oyo as the spiritual rulers of all Yoruba.

THE RISE OF OYO POWER

Oyo was at first a small and insignificant state on the northern borders of Yorubaland near the Niger. It is not certain when Oyo began to expand its power. But it is known that by the end of the fifteenth century, its influence was widespread in most parts of Yorubaland except the coastal region. It is recorded that when the

Portuguese first visited Benin in 1485, they inquired whether a powerful king of the interior they had heard of was the much sought-after Prester John. The Oba of Benin told them of a powerful monarch in the hinterland whose face was never seen by his subjects. This reference was made to the Alafin of Oyo. It is evident therefore that the establishment of Oyo supremacy over the Yoruba states had started before the visit of the first Europeans to the Guinea coast.

However, towards the end of the sixteenth century a southward expansion of Oyo by conquest of the Yoruba states is noticeable. The cause of this southward conquest is not clearly known. As pointed out earlier, the popular theory among European historians is that the desire of Oyo to participate in the developing European coastal trade was the cause. Against this, it must be said that the economy of Oyo at this period was basically agricultural, and European trade did not yet offer such attractions as to generate wars of conquest. Moreover, European products had not grown so popular in the interior. In fact, Oyo was still looking northwards to the Sudan from where it imported salt and horses, and not south towards the sea. Furthermore, the wars of expansion of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were not fought to procure slaves for export to the coast but for local service on Yoruba farms. It was not until the eighteenth century that wars to provide slaves for sale to Europeans became important.

The reasons for this expansion by conquest must be sought within the state itself. It is likely that the desire to increase royal revenue by adding on tax-paying provinces and tribute-paying vassal states might have been a strong incentive for military expansion.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, Oyo was at the peak of its power and had built a vast empire. The empire was bounded to the north by the Niger, to the east by Benin, to the west by the frontiers of modern Togo, and to the south by the mangrove swamps and lagoons. Nupe, Borgu and Dahomey paid tribute to the Alafin of Oyo.

Several factors account for the rise of Oyo to a great Negro empire. Firstly, its situation in the fertile savannah country made it a rich agricultural state capable of producing enough food to sustain a large population. Secondly, it was well situated as a

centre of communication and trade passing through the Niger to the north. It became an important centre of the kola nut trade to the Sudanese states. The third and most important factor was the introduction of the horse from the Sudan, which had a strong cavalry. All these, coupled with the military organisation based on a feudal army led by able generals who faced suicide in the event of failure, explain the phenomenal rise of Oyo to a great empire.

LIFE IN THE OYO EMPIRE

GOVERNMENT OF THE EMPIRE

The political organisation of the Oyo empire was somewhat similar to that of Kanem-Bornu. The government of the capital or metropolitan area of Old Oyo was in the hands of the Alafin and his Council of Seven called the *Oyomesi*. The members of this aristocratic council of state were leaders of the seven wards into which the capital was divided.

The *Oyomesi* elected a new Alafin from among the members of the royal family and also checked the powers of the Alafin, who could not act without their authority in matters of state policy. If an Alafin became tyrannical over his people, the *Oyomesi* would force him to commit suicide by presenting him with an empty calabash, or parrot's eggs, which signified that his people had rejected him. In addition to being kingmakers the *Oyomesi* also performed legislative, executive and judicial functions.

The most powerful among the *Oyomesi* was the *Bashrun*, or Prime Minister of the state. It was he who could inform the Alafin of the people's decision that he should commit suicide. Beneath the rank of the *Oyomesi* were the non-hereditary class of military officials whose leader was the *Kakanfo*, or commander-in-chief of the Oyo army.

The activities of both the Alafin and the *Oyomesi* were checked by the *Ogboni* cult. The *Ogboni* was a secret society of freemen, remarkable for their age and experience, and who were the social, political and religious leaders of the state. The cult was devoted to the worship of the Earth goddess. The members sometimes mediated between the Alafin and the *Oyomesi*.

The rest of Yorubaland outside the capital was divided into provinces or chiefdoms, each ruled by an Oba or minor king. The relationship between the Alafin and the Obas was a feudal one, that is, the Alafin ruled over the Obas who owed him certain obligations such as allowing central control in respect of their external affairs, revenue collection, military levies and appeals to the Alafin's court in matters between one Oba and another. The Alafin installed in every province an officer or viceroy called the Ilari who saw that provincial obligations to the Alafin especially with regard to tax-collection and raising of military levies were carried out. Except for this degree of central control, the Obas enjoyed a large measure of internal autonomy.

Yorubaland had a special place in the empire. It had an entity of its own based on a common language, culture, and religion which featured the worship of ancestors and common gods such as Sango the god of thunder, and belief in a Supreme Being. These formed the bond of union in the empire.

Outside Yorubaland, there were many other states under the suzerainty of Oyo. The Alafin's influence in those states rarely went beyond the collection of annual tribute paid by them to 'buy peace' and in return for the protection which the Oyo army could give them in times of need.

MILITARY ORGANISATION

According to Johnson in his book *History of the Yorubas*, there was no standing army in Oyo, but every able-bodied man served in the military campaigns which took place usually in the dry season. Local levies were raised by the provincial governors, and the combined army was commanded by the Kakanfo. If the Kakanfo was defeated in battle, he was bound to commit suicide rather than return to Oyo in shame. This custom later led to the foundation of Yoruba colonies outside Yorubaland especially in Dahomey, which has a considerable number of Yoruba-speaking people. The reason was that instead of committing suicide, unsuccessful Kakanfos and their armies preferred to settle outside the frontiers of the Oyo empire.

The Oyo army consisted of both infantry and cavalry. It was the latter, which was a novelty in the forest region of the south, that made the Oyo army so successful in war.

ECONOMY OF THE STATE

Agriculture was the main basis of the wealth of the state for every citizen was a farmer. Before the eighteenth century, trade with the Sudan was another source of wealth. Oyo exported to the Sudan kola nuts from the south and locally woven cloth, and imported salt, dresses and horses from there.

Taxes from the provinces and tribute from subject states provided the greater bulk of royal revenue. For instance, between 1729 and 1781, Dahomey paid an annual tribute of forty men, forty women, forty guns and 4 000 loads of cowries and coral to Oyo. Dr I. Akinjogbin has said that this expressed in terms of money amounted to about £32 000 (₦ 64 000).

But from the eighteenth century however, there was a gradual change in the direction of Oyo trade from the north to the south where coastal trade with Europeans was developing. From then on, the sale and export of slaves and the import of European arms and other goods formed an important aspect of the economic activity of the Oyo state. Benin, Badagry and modern Porto Novo (Little Ardrah) were the ports for the external trade of Oyo.

DECLINE AND FALL OF THE OYO EMPIRE

The Oyo empire reached the zenith of its power in the first half of the eighteenth century. In the second half of that century, the first signs of the decline of the empire began to appear with the breakaway of kings formerly subject to the Alafin. For instance, in 1781, Gezo, the king of Dahomey, refused to continue the payment of the crushing annual tribute to the Alafin. About the same time the Egba under Lishabi asserted their independence and successfully defeated an Oyo army sent to punish them by Alafin Abiodun. With the death of this Alafin at the end of this century, the empire began to disintegrate. Johnson says of him,

"He was the last of the kings... by 1819 the different parts of the kingdom together in one imperial way, and with time ended the tranquillity and prosperity of the Yoruba country."

One of the chief reasons for the decline and eventual break-up government. Political unrest and instability caused by the struggle for power between the Alafin's and Obas made in the eighteenth century made the central administration incapable of keeping the vast empire intact. For about twenty years, for example, Oyo was torn by internal strife during the period when the *Oba*, Bashun Gaha (c. 1754-76) usurped the throne of the Alafin. King Abiodun who attempted to arrest the confused situation had to destroy Gaha with all his kith and kin. It was this weakness of the central government which made it impossible to keep the large number of subordinate kings under efficient control.

Because of this decline of central control over the subordinate kings of the provinces and the vassal states, they began to defy the authority of the Alafin. The Obas began to assert their independence, while the tribute-paying states discontinued the payment of tribute to the Alafin. The example of the Egba and Dahomey rebellions against Oyo has been quoted above. But the most important, perhaps, of these rebellions was that by the Kakawu Alonja of Ilorin who successfully achieved the independence of his town with the aid of the Fulani in 1817. Other Obas followed his example, and those of the Egba and Dahomey and the empire fell apart.

Unfortunately, there was no strong central army to crush these revolts. "The Oyo army," says Dr A. A. B. Aderibigbe, "with its solid core of cavalry which was formerly the effective instrument of expansion as well as the bugbear of tributary states was now a ghost of its former self." Rather, the feudal military organisation of the state gave provincial kings the instrument to defy the Alafin's authority and effect their independence. The defeat of the Oyo army by the Egba illustrates the superiority of provincial armies to the imperial army of Oyo at this time.

Another important factor was the undermining of the economic basis of Oyo town itself. According to Michael Crowther, this was because the axis of the Oyo empire was shifting southwards as coastal trade in slaves and European goods was turning the

FACTORS WHICH FACILITATED THE BREAK-UP OF THE OYO EMPIRE

Oyo into many loose federations which were the north to compete with the south. Consequently, the axis of Oyo or the northern kingdom was not too far removed from the axis of economic power. So the provincial kings situated far from the capital.

Certainly the slave trade played its role too in the decline of the Oyo empire. Firstly, the great wealth which it brought to the Alafin in the eighteenth century made him increasingly tyrannical in the use of their power to the oppressed subjects and their rulers began to yearn for freedom. Secondly, the desire to participate in the lucrative slave trade by every provincial king made them enslave their fellow Yoruba. This resulted in endless civil wars in the nineteenth century which destroyed the empire.

Finally, the chaotic situation in Yorubaland was aggravated by Fulani pressure on the northern provinces of the empire during the jihad and the resultant scattered movement of the Oyo people. The era of the Yoruba civil wars and the Fulani jihad marked the final break-up and eclipse of the Oyo empire.

WHY THE OYO EMPIRE LASTED SO LONG

You will remember that the little kingdom of Kangaba which later became the empire of Mali rose to imperial greatness under Sundiata in the thirteenth century and collapsed in the fifteenth century. You will recall also that the Ghana kingdom of Songhai rose to power under Sonni Ali in the fifteenth century and disintegrated after the Moorish conquest in 1591. But the Oyo empire lasted from the fifteenth century to the early years of the nineteenth century. It is therefore acclaimed as one of the most long-lasting of the ancient empires of West Africa. Now, why was the Oyo empire able to survive for so many centuries? Much of the answer to this question has been discussed earlier in this chapter. Here, I need only summarise the points briefly for your convenience.

Firstly, the efficiency of the Oyo army was an important factor for the long survival of the empire. The organisation of the Oyo army has already been discussed. So long as the army remained intact and loyal to the Alafin, it was the means of expanding the

tumults of the empire, and suppressing internal revolts. Oyo was fortunate that the efficiency of its army did not decline until the period of political chaos in the later half of the eighteenth century.

Secondly, the empire itself was superbly organised and administered. The central government of the Alafin and the Oyomesi, with the provincial administration of the Ilaris, was strong and capable of coping with the problems of the empire. It was the struggle for power between the Alafins and Bashruns in the second half of the eighteenth century that weakened the central government and led to the decline of the empire.

Thirdly, the power of the Oyo state before the eighteenth century rested on a basis of sound economy—agriculture, trade with the Sudan, lucrative industries and wealth from tax and tribute. The financial resources for maintaining the imperial administration were therefore not lacking. It was that change in the direction of West African trade from the north to the coast and the baneful effects of the slave trade that undermined the economy of the Oyo state and this helped its decline and eventual downfall.

Fourthly, though it is not very certain, yet, it can be safely assumed that Oyo was blessed, before this period of decline, with many able Alafins who efficiently coped with the task of imperial government. For instance, we are told that Oranmiyan, the founder of the Oyo kingdom, was a warlike king; that Sango was fiery and dreaded by his subjects. We learn that Orompoto regained the lost military glory of Old Oyo, while Ojiji brought Dahomey into the Oyo empire. The great Abiodun came when the fortunes of the empire had passed redemption.

Finally, Yorubaland which was the heart of the empire was strongly knit together by certain bonds. A common language, religion, culture and feeling of kinship arising from traditions of a common ancestry held the Yoruba strongly together under the protective umbrella of the Oyo government and army. But, at the same time, all the parts of the empire were made to feel a sense of common loyalty to the empire by the presence of the Ilaris or Alafin's representatives and by their taking part in the celebration of the Bere—the Alafin's annual festival. During such celebrations, the provincial governors and kings showed respect to the Alafin and pride in their imperial connections.

QUESTIONS

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QUESTIONS

1. Write brief notes on the Oyoimesi. (Nov. 1967)
2. Describe briefly the system of government of the Old Oyo empire in the period before 1800. (Nov. 1968; Nov. 1972; Nov. 1977; Nov. 1978)
3. What were the main factors responsible for the rise of the Old Oyo empire? (Nov. 1971; June 1973; Nov. 1975)
4. Account for the strength, before the beginning of the nineteenth century, of the Oyo empire. (June 1975)
5. Give a brief account of the relations between the Oyo empire and the kingdom of Dahomey under Agaja Trudo. (June 1976) (See also Chapter 12, on Dahomey)
6. Do you think that the Oyo state owed its rise to power to some external influence?
7. Describe the military organisation and economy of the Oyo empire at the height of its power in the eighteenth century.
8. How do you account for the decline of the Oyo empire?
9. Why was the Oyo empire able to survive for so long?

Chapter 2

10

WEST AFRICA: THE GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

The traditional economic life of the people is simple. Before the advent of Europeans each village was to a large extent self-sufficient, for the people produced most of their needs. Agriculture was and still is the principal occupation. The main crops are yam, plantain and oil palm. Maize, cassava, oranges and mangoes were introduced from Asia and America. The chief domestic animals are goats, dogs, sheep and hens. Cattle and horses are reared only by the mixed Negroes who inhabit the grasslands, for these animals cannot thrive in the forestlands owing to the ravages of the tsetse fly.

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways have geographical factors influenced the history of West Africa?
2. Show the differences in the effects which influences from the north and the coast have had upon the peoples of West Africa.
3. Describe briefly the geographical distribution of the principal peoples of West Africa. Illustrate your answer with a sketch-map.
4. Who are the pure Negroes? What are their special characteristics?

Commercial middlemen
Cultural History
Geography
middlemen markets

EMPIRES OF THE WESTERN SUDAN

(I) The Ghana Empire

The word "Sudan", meaning "the country of the Black People", is the name given by the Arabs to the great belt of savannah country stretching from the Atlantic to the Red Sea. The Sahara is its northern boundary while south of it lies the tropical forest. We are concerned here with the Western Sudan, that is, that part of the savannah country stretching from the Atlantic to the western limits of the Hausa states.

Powerful Negro empires rose to greatness in this region during the period known in European history as the Middle Ages. Three of these empires stand out in history and are the subject of our study: Ghana, Mali and Songhai.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STATES OF WESTERN SUDAN IN WEST AFRICAN HISTORY

From the commercial point of view, these states are important for they acted as middlemen between the peoples of the forest countries to the south and those of North Africa. Their towns were the great markets for gold and slaves from the forest countries; for salt from the Sahara mines; for horses, cloth, swords, books and haberdashery from North Africa and Europe.

From the cultural point of view, they also acted as intermediaries for the spread of ideas. From the eleventh century

middlemen markets

wards, the towns of the Western Sudan were the main centres from which Islamic religion and culture brought across the Sahara from North Africa began to be spread among the peoples of the savannah and sub-savannah country of West Africa.

From the point of view of history, the study of the history of these great Negro empires helps to dispel the false imperialist theory that the African has no past; that Africa is what Europe made it. It is now known that "the Empire of Ghana flourished ... during the dark ages of Western Europe. By the fifteenth century, there was a university at Timbuktu. The thesis, that Africa is what Western European missionaries, traders, technicians and administrators have made it is comforting (to Western Europeans) but invalid" (Thomas Hodgkin: *The Highway*, February 1952).

Even from the ethnographic viewpoint, these states are important because their subjects are the ancestors of some of the peoples of the modern states of West Africa. For instance, according to J. C. de Graft-Johnson, in his book *African Glory*, the Akan tribes of modern Ghana (the Ashanti, Fanti, Akim and Akwapi) trace their original home to the Old Ghana empire from where their ancestors marched south after the Almoravid conquest of the empire in AD 1076. The Mandingoes of Sierra Leone look on Sundiata, the founder of Mali, as their national hero.

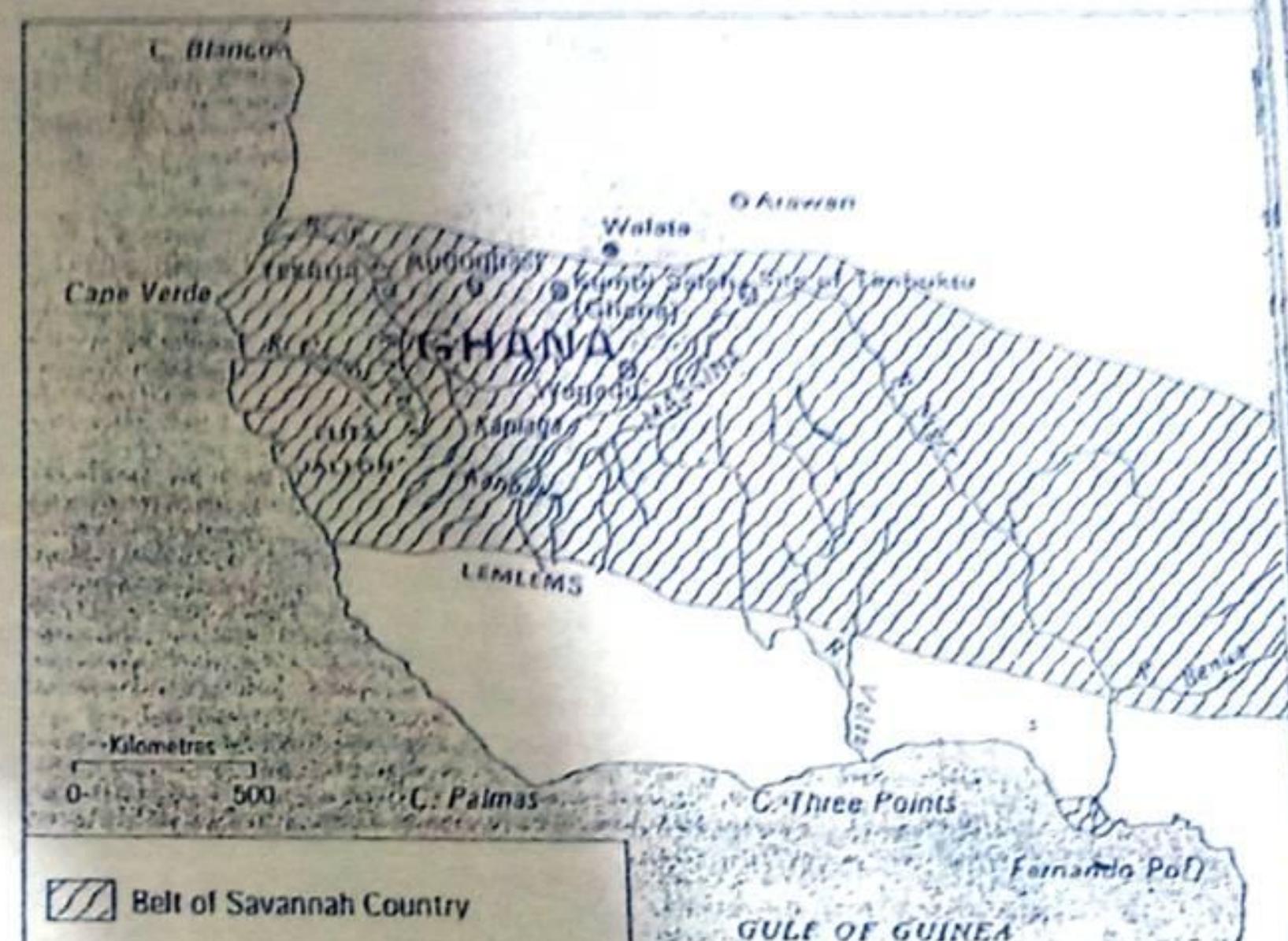
The Ghana Empire

EARLY HISTORY

Ghana is one of the earliest known Negro empires in recorded history. It was first mentioned by an Arab geographer, Al-Fazari, in AD 773 in his book *Al-Masudi*, where he referred to it as "a land of gold". Ghana is also found on the first Islamic world map produced by a Persian geographer, Mohammed Khwarizmi, in the ninth century. The Arab traveller Al-Bakri, writing in AD 1067, tells us that the name "Ghana" was the title of the Soninke kingdom called Aoukar. The title means "war chief". It was visiting Arabs and people from other parts of the Sudan who

EARLY HISTORY

Aoukar



Map III: The Ghana Empire

referred to the kingdom by the title of its kings; and by the ninth century, Aoukar was popularly known as "Ghana".

It is not yet certain how and when Ghana was founded. But from Arab sources, particularly the *Tarikh as Sudan*, it appears to have been founded by a Soninke dynasty between AD 300–400.

The Ghana kingdom was situated on the grasslands north of the headwaters of the rivers Senegal and Niger. Its capital, Kumbi Saleh, is said to have been founded by Kaya Maghan, who is reputed to have overthrown the immigrant minority ruling class of "whites" (products of intermarriage between Berber settlers and Negro indigenes) about AD 770 and established a pure Soninke dynasty.

By AD 1000 the Soninke kingdom had extended its territory west to the river Senegal, south to the Bambuk region, east to the Niger and north to the Berber town of Audogast on the southern edge

EMPIRES OF THE WESTERN SUDAN: GHANA

of the Sahara desert. By the middle of the eleventh century, when Ghana was at the zenith of its imperial expansion, it controlled the area covering most of the modern states of Senegal, Mali and Mauritania—a territory of roughly 650 000 square kilometres with a population of several million people.

GHANA IN THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

It is believed that the people of the Ghana empire did not develop a system of writing, for no records of theirs have as yet been discovered. All that we have of Ghana has come from the writings of Arab scholars and travellers. One of the best of such written accounts is that of Al-Bakri, an Arab scholar of Cordoba in southern Spain. In his book *Kitab al-Masalik wa'l Mamalik*, written in 1067, Al-Bakri has left extremely interesting and useful information on the emperor and the magnificence of his court, the system of government, defence, economy, taxation and trade. Al-Bakri never visited the Western Sudan himself but collected his information from Muslim merchants of North Africa engaged in the trans-Saharan trade.

THE KING OR EMPEROR

Al-Bakri portrays vividly the pomp and pageantry of the Ghana emperor:

"The King adorns himself like a woman, wearing necklaces and bracelets, and when he sits before the people, he puts on a high cap decorated with gold and wrapped in turbans of fine cloth. The court of appeal is held in a domed pavilion around which stand ten horses with gold-embroidered trappings. Behind the King stand ten pages holding shields and swords decorated with gold, and on his right are sons of the subordinate kings... all wearing splendid garments and with their hair mixed with gold. On the ground around him are seated his ministers, whilst the governor of the city sits before him. On guard at the door are dogs of fine pedigree, wearing collars of gold and silver adorned with knobs.... The royal audience is announced by the beating of a drum.... When

KAYA MAGHAN

GHANA IN THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

the people have gathered, his co-religionists draw near upon their knees, sprinkling dust upon their heads as a sign of respect, while the Muslims clap hands as their form of greeting."

At the time Al-Bakri was writing, Ghana's emperors were pagans and lived in the pagan section of Kumbi Saleh, the capital.

Some of the emperors' names have come down to us. Kaya Maghan was the black Soninke ruler who overthrew the minority "white" Berber dynasty and established a pure Soninke dynasty in about AD 770. He was an able ruler and united all the Soninke people under his leadership. It is believed that he founded Kumbi Saleh as his capital. His successors extended the empire eastwards and westwards.

Basi ruled Ghana in the eleventh century. He is said to have been a wise ruler who encouraged the Muslims who lived in or visited Ghana, even though he remained a pagan.

Tenkaminen succeeded Basi in 1072. He is mentioned in Al-Bakri's book: "The King who governs them at present... is called Tenkaminen; he came to the throne in AH 455 (AD 1072-73).... Tenkaminen is the master of a large empire and a formidable power...." However, it was under him that Kumbi Saleh was lost to the Almoravids in 1076.

GOVERNMENT

At the height of its power in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the government of the empire was remarkably efficient.

In central administration, the king was assisted by a cabinet of ministers and civil servants supervising one aspect of state affairs or the other. By 1067, the majority of the cabinet officials were Muslims chosen for their literacy in Arabic and wider knowledge of the world. The Vizier, or Prime Minister, the Court Interpreter and the State Treasurer were Muslims. The emperor had flags which were carried before him as he rode round the city to receive the petitions of his subjects. There were a court of justice and a court of appeal at the capital.

Because the empire was very vast, it was divided into provinces. In the Soninke areas, Soninke governors appointed by the central government were in charge of the provinces. In the non-Soninke

provinces, the local kings ruled. The sons of such subject-kings were kept at the emperor's court at Kumbi Saleh as a guarantee of their continued loyalty to the emperor.

Below the provincial governors and vassal kings were the district chiefs who enjoyed some degree of local autonomy in their traditional clan areas. All the rulers of the provinces paid annual tribute to the emperor and contributed their quota of warriors to the imperial army when required to do so. In return for this service, the emperor ensured the provincial peoples protection against external enemies and the peace and facilities they required for participation in the prosperous trade of the empire.

KUMBI SALEH

The capital city of Ghana was Kumbi Saleh. According to Al-Bakri's account, the city consisted of two townships about ten kilometres apart. One was the Muslim section and the other the pagan section known as Al Ghaba, meaning "the grove". The Muslim township had twelve mosques and many Muslim scholars and jurists lived in it. Arabic was the written language here and throughout the empire.

Al Ghaba was the royal town. Here some houses were built of stone and thatched with straw. The royal palace was built of stone and "adorned with sculptures, paintings and glass windows" and was enclosed by a wall. Other buildings were of mud and thatched with straw. There was a stone mosque in Al Ghaba for Muslim officials and diplomats at the royal court.

Several archaeological excavations have been carried out in this century to identify the site of Kumbi Saleh, notably by Bonnel de Menzies in 1914; Lazartigues in 1939 and Thomassey, Mauney and Szumowski in 1949-51. The site of the discovered Kumbi Saleh is about 320 kilometres north of Bamako in modern Mali. Discoveries show that it was a well-populated city.

JUSTICE

The administration of justice in Ghana was taken seriously. In Kumbi Saleh, the king moved around every day on his horse inviting his subjects who had any complaints to come to his court.

At court sessions, he sat patiently and listened to petitioners with his councillors and saw that justice was dispensed. Al-Bakri says that administration of justice was based on "trial by fetish". An accused is given some special potion to drink. If he vomits after drinking it, he is declared innocent; if he does not then he is declared guilty.

In the provinces, a chief judicial officer was attached to each governor to assist him to dispense justice. At the district and village level, the local chief tried cases. There was provision for people to appeal to the provincial governors or vassal kings and in the last resort, to the emperor himself. Two systems of law operated side by side: Soninke customary law for pagans and Muslim law for Muslims.

DEFENCE

Ghana's strength derived not only from the ability of its 'semi-divine' emperors and its efficient system of government but above all from its strong army and system of defence. A large and strong army was necessary for the maintenance of peace and suppression of revolts, control of immigration, defence of the frontiers and acquisition of new territories by conquest.

At the height of its power in the eleventh century, Al-Bakri says that the king could put 200 000 warriors and more than 40 000 archers on the field at short notice. This colossal military machine was made up mainly of levies of able-bodied men recruited when necessary from the provinces. There was no standing army but the king possessed a bodyguard of about a thousand trained soldiers. In addition to its size, the Ghana army had a cavalry wing mounted on horses obtained through trade with North Africa. Moreover, the army fought with metal weapons—spears, swords and iron-tipped arrows—which were as yet unknown to other Western Sudanese peoples with whom Ghana had military encounters.

ECONOMY

Ghana's wealth came principally from the trans-Saharan trade. Merchants from North Africa flocked to its famous market to

ORIGINS OF THE ALMORAVIDS

The word "Almoravid" is derived from the Arabic *Al-Murabitun*, which means "people of the monastery". It is used to describe a fanatical sect of Muslims which sprang up in the north-western region of the Western Sudan in the eleventh century. The Almoravid movement was led by a learned Muslim preacher called Abdullah ibn Yasin. Having returned from a pilgrimage to Mecca, Ibn Yasin had started to preach to the Sanhaja Berbers of the south-western Sahara about a return to pure Islam. At first he was rebuffed by the people. So he retreated to an island at the mouth of the Senegal river. Here he spent several years in ascetic worship and was joined by a growing band of fanatical disciples.

In 1042, Ibn Yasin and his followers launched a militant religious movement, or *jihad*, aimed initially at conquering and bringing heretical Muslim Berbers back to true Islam and converting the pagan peoples of the Western Sudan. A wing of the Almoravids moved south to the Ghana empire. In 1054, they recaptured Audogast, the great Berber trading centre, and in 1076, under a leader named Abu Bekir, they captured Kumbi Saleh, the capital of Ghana. But their rule was short-lived, for after the death of Abu Bekir in 1087, the Almoravid power collapsed and Ghana regained its independence.

REASONS FOR INVASION OF GHANA

The Almoravids had religious, commercial and political motives for the invasion of Ghana.

① Religious

The Almoravid movement was primarily a movement for the purification and spread of Islam by a holy war, or *jihad*. The Almoravids invaded Ghana because it was a pagan kingdom and its kings had resisted conversion to Islam though they tolerated Muslims living or trading in the empire. They therefore wanted to convert the Ghana emperor and his pagan subjects to Islam by conquest.

THE ALMORAVIDS AND THE FALL OF GHANA

② Commercial

The Almoravid Berbers wished to regain control of the southern trans-Saharan trade route which they lost when Audogast, their principal caravan centre, was captured by Ghana in AD 990. That objective they achieved in 1054 when they recaptured Audogast and also took Sijilmasa, another important northern terminus of this trans-Saharan trade route.

Again, the Almoravids were jealous of the prosperity of Ghana and so invaded that empire to acquire its wealth and take over its prosperous trade.

③ Political

The Almoravid Berbers wanted to put a halt to Ghana's northern expansion, which was a serious threat to their political independence.

EFFECTS OF THE CONQUEST

① Political

The Almoravid conquest resulted in the disintegration of the empire. Their invasion of Ghana was a signal to many vassal states to regain their independence. Thus, Silla, Tekrur and Anbara rebelled and joined forces with the Almoravid army to conquer Ghana.

The military defeats suffered by Ghana weakened the strength of its army and rendered it incapable of suppressing the rebellious vassal states. Consequently, the Ghana empire reverted to the original metropolitan Ghana.

② Economic

The war the Almoravids waged against Ghana diverted both manpower and attention from the soil. Agriculture in the empire was thus neglected and ruined.

The war also caused a cessation of the trans-Saharan trade. Since the Ghana emperor and his subjects were dependent on this trade for their wealth, they therefore became impoverished.

Following the Almoravid capture of Kumbi Saleh in 1076, the Muslim merchants fled to Walata in 1224 and established a new commercial centre.

1. Give a concise description of the internal organisation of the Old Ghana empire in the eleventh century. (WASC 1966)
2. What were the main sources of the wealth of the ancient empire of Ghana? How did this wealth help the empire? (1972, 1977)
3. What were the factors responsible for the rise of Ghana?
4. Describe the part played by the Ghana empire in the trans-Saharan trade and show the benefits it obtained from that trade. (1973)
5. Describe the main factors responsible for the fall of the Ghana empire in the first half of the thirteenth century. (1975)
6. What part did trade play in the rise and fall of the ancient Ghana empire? (1971)
7. How did geographical factors contribute to the rise and fall of the ancient empire of Ghana? (1980)
8. What were the consequences of the collapse of the Ghana empire?
9. Outline the early history of the Almoravids and show how they influenced the history of the Ghana empire. (1970, 1975)

Chapter 3

EMPIRES OF THE
WESTERN SUDAN
(II) The Mali Empire

EARLY HISTORY

The empire which came to be known as Mali originated from the little Mande kingdom called Kangaba. This kingdom evolved from the unification of a number of small villages known as *dugn* and ruled by local chieftains called *dugungi*. The unification which appears to have been completed long before the end of the twelfth century was the work of a chief of the Keita clan who thus established the Keita dynasty of Kangaba. It is likely that the fusion of the villages was motivated by the desire to present a united front against external enemies and to participate more profitably in the trans-Saharan trade.

It was perhaps for administrative convenience and commercial advantage that Senniata moved the capital of the kingdom from Jeriba to Niani near modern Bamako. Arab travellers called the new capital Mali, meaning "the place where the king lives", and the empire became popularly known by this name.

The early kings of Kangaba are not known to history. However, according to Sheikh Uthman, a Muslim writer, the first king of Kangaba to be converted to Islam about the middle of the eleventh century was Baramendana (AD 1050). He is said to have made a pilgrimage to Mecca and this practice was faithfully followed by his successors. Unlike Ghana, Mali became a Muslim state from a very early stage of its existence as a kingdom.