CHAPTER VI BIOGRAPHY OF THE SCHOLARS OF JENNE

God, the Most High, drew into this blessed city a number of [29] teachers and pious people, strangers to the country, who came to dwell there; these characters came from different tribes and from various lands. Here are the biographies of some of them.

Murimagha-Kankoi {1}. - He was originally from Tâïo, a village situated between Bigho and Koukir. He went to Kabara to study there, and from there he set out for Jenne in the middle of the ninth century of the Hegira, if I am not mistaken. He was a renowned jurisconsult, theologian, saintly man and devotee, and his students flocked to his lessons, eager to benefit from his brilliant teaching.

At midnight, the master would leave his house and go to the mosque to spread his knowledge. The students would then sit around him and follow his lectures until it was time for the morning prayer. When the prayer was over, they would return to their seats and stay there until noon {2} when the teacher would return home. The classes would be resumed after the dohor prayer and ended after the asr prayer.

Such were the habits of this teacher when, on a certain day when he was performing the morning prayer with the Imam, he heard a man standing next to him make the following invocation at the time of prostration: "O my God! Murimagha-Kankoi saddens our city, rid us of him!"

As soon as he had made the final salutation {3}, Murimagha cried out, "Lord! I do not know what wrongs I have done to the [30] people of this city that they should curse me thus." The same day he left Jenne to go to Kouna where he stayed. The people of Djindjo, having learned what had happened, sent him a boat which brought him back to their home where he remained until his death (God have mercy on him and let us benefit from his merits!). The tomb of Murimagha is well known in Djindjo and people go there on pilgrimage.

The jurisconsult Foudiya-Mohammed-Foudiki'-Sanou-El-Ouankori. - This jurisconsult, theologian, holy devout and virtuous personage, settled in Jenne at the end of the ix {1} century of the hegira (١٧). He had left his homeland, situated in the territory of Bito, as a result of disturbances which had broken out there, and was on his way to Dienne, when the following adventure happened to him:

One day he had walked until sunset, when he stopped at a certain place to perform the Maghreb prayer. He spread his burnous on the ground, sat on it and performed the obligatory prayer. When he had finished the obligatory prayer, he started to perform other supererogatory prayers when a thief came from behind him and gently pulled the part of the burnous that he had under one of his feet; the saint having withdrawn his foot, the thief then pulled the part of the burnous that was under the other foot. The devotee did the same thing and withdrew his other foot and remained standing, unmoved, without interrupting his prayer. Seeing this, the thief, frightened, put back the burnous as it was before he had pulled it and made an act of repentance in the hands of his victim. God knows best if this is true.

He was a man of great courage and was a man of great courage, and he was a man of great courage and he was a man of great courage. [31] From there, every Friday, he went to Dienne to perform his devotions and no one knew who he was.

One day, one of the great figures of the Sultan's entourage saw in a dream someone who said to him: "This man, who has just come from Tourâ to perform the Friday prayer in your house, will secure against any disturbance the city in which he and his children will establish their residence; and, his tomb, in whatever city it may be, will throw, among those who would want to frighten the inhabitants of that city, a greater panic than that which the assailants would seek to produce." This dream was repeated three times. On the third time, the great personage obtained a description of the holy man.

Immediately he went and told the Sultan all about his dream, and the Sultan ordered him to watch for the man and, as soon as he saw him, to bring him to him. When the courtier saw the man who had been described to him in his dream, he brought him to the sultan, saying, "This is indeed the personage who answers to the description I saw in my dreams."

The Sultan ordered Foudiya to remain in the city of Dienne. Foudiya immediately set about demolishing the temple of the idol which the pagans had worshipped, and at the same time had the houses within its precincts pulled down; as (١٨) since the conversion of the inhabitants to Islam they had remained deserted, he had them restored to serve as dwelling houses. The sultan donated them to the saint, whom he treated with the highest honors and surrounded with the highest consideration. In spite of all this, the holy man would not associate with anyone, nor accept any invitation to dinner. The Sultan insisted on several occasions without being able to overcome his resistance.

One day, however, one of the Sultan's vassals {1} who had deserted and was threatened with death for doing so, came to the saint and begged him to accompany him to the prince and save his life. "It is not my custom to go to his house," replied Foudiya. - Then," replied the man, "you will be responsible for my death, for tomorrow my soul will accuse you when it stands before God, if you do not come with me." On hearing these words, the saint, who understood their gravity, overcame his repugnance and left immediately and in haste to accompany his interlocutor to the Sultan. The Sultan was quite surprised at this step when he was informed of it: he gave the order to let the saint in, and as soon as he was informed of the purpose of his visit, he said to him: "I pardon your protégé and all his relatives of all crimes and offences and I exonerate them for the rest of their lives from all royal dues. However, it is on the condition that you will eat with me from my kitchen {1}." Foudiya agreed. The meal was served, and the sheikh held out his hand to help himself; but before he had even touched the food, his hand swelled horribly. "You see what happens to me," said the sheikh, and he rose and left surrounded by esteem and respect." The Sultan nevertheless left the vassal and his relatives in peace as he had promised. Such is the power that God grants to saints and virtuous men.

When the holy man in God, the jurisconsult Sidi Mohammed-ben-'Omar-ben-Mohammed-Aqit came to Jenne, he saw Foudiya and greatly admired his conduct. On his return to Timbuktu, he praised him highly. It was as a result of this that on his return from the pilgrimage, the prince of the believers Askia-El-Hâdj-Mohammed, invested Foudiya with the functions of [33] cadi of Jenne. He was the first cadi in that city to settle disputes between the inhabitants according to Muslim law. In the past, disputes were brought before the khatib {1} who settled them by conciliating the parties. This is still the custom of the negroes, but the whites take the cadis as judges. This is the way things are done nowadays.

All that has just been reported about the virtues of the sheikh has been seen and witnessed by many people. As for the prayers made on his tomb, they are all answered in a complete way. This tomb is located in a courtyard (١٩) of the mosque, near the mihrab which is located in the wall that closes the mosque to the north. God have mercy on this sheikh, show him his satisfaction and draw some of his blessings upon us. Amen!

The cadi El-'Abbas-Kibi. - Inhabitant of Jenne, Oua'kri by origin, this character was at the same time a jurisconsult and a remarkable theologian, an eminent, good and generous man. He had a great fund of generosity. His tomb is located inside the mosque near the end of the southern side. God have mercy on him!

The cadi Mahmoud-ben-Abou-Bekr-Baghyo'o, father of two eminent scholars: the jurisconsult Mohammed-Baghyo'o and the jurisconsult Ahmed-Baghyo'o. - A resident of Jenne, Ouankori by origin, he was an outstanding jurisconsult and theologian. After the death of the cadi El'Abbas-Kibi, in 959 (1552), he was invested with the functions of cadi by order of the son of the Emir Askia-El-Hadj-Mohammed, Askia-Ishâq, after the latter's return from the Ta'ba expedition.

The cadi Ahmed-Torfo, son of the cadi 'Omar-Torfo. - He was a native of Jenne and lived in that town, where he exercised the functions of preacher, then of imam of the mosque and finally of cadi. He held these three offices simultaneously; at the time of his departure for the pilgrimage he was replaced as preacher by the khatib Mama, as imam of the mosque by Imam Yahya and finally as cadi by the cadi Mouaddib {1} -Bokar-Terouari. He died in Mecca (God have mercy on him!) and each of the three deputies became the holder of his office. As for the cadi Bokar, of whom we have just spoken, he was a native of Kala and belonged to the royal family of that country. He devoted himself to piety while in power, and, a slave to science, he owed divine favors to these virtues.

The cadi Mohammed-Benba-Kenâti. - Of Ouankori origin, he was an illustrious jurisconsult and scholar. He was appointed cadi after the death of the cadi Bokar-Terouari. He was the last cadi under the Sudanese dynasty {2}.

Such are the famous scholars of the city of Jenne. We have given their names in this book only because of the fame they acquired through their science. May their mention draw down upon us the blessings of Heaven!

Here is the list of cadis in the order in which they succeeded each other. The cadi Mohammed-Foudiya-Sânou; the cadi Fouko; the cadi Kanadji; the cadi (٢٠) Tanatâ'o {3}; the cadi Sonqomo; the cadi El-'Abbâs-Kibi ; Cadi Mahmud-Baghyo'o; Cadi 'Omar-Torfo; Cadi Tolmà-Kilisi {4}; Cadi Ahmed-Torfo, son of Cadi 'Omar-Torfo {5}; Cadi Muaddib-Bokar {6} - Terouari; the cadi Mohammed-Benba-Kanàti. Such were the cadis from [35] the beginning of the dynasty of the prince of the believers Askia-El-Hàdj-Mohammed until its end.

The list of the cadis of this city who succeeded them will be found later on, if God pleases, when the Ahmadi, Hashemite, Abbasid and Moloui dynasties of the ruler of Merrakesh (God have mercy on him!) are mentioned. As for the scholars of the white race {1}, there were a great number who settled in Jenne and who came from Timbuktu. We shall mention some of them, God willing, when we make the obituary of the characters of the aforementioned Ahmadi dynasty.

Notes:

p. 29:

<note n="1}Or "Muri-Magha" in two words. The vowels are not indicated here in ms. C; but they are later on. For all proper names the spelling given is almost always that of the ms. C.</note>

<note n="2}The word الزوال refers to the hour of noon; the dohor prayer does not take place until an hour later. As for that of asr, it is known to take place at the intermediate time between noon and sunset.< /note>

<note n="3}" Of prayer." That is, when he had completely finished his prayer.< /note>

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<note n="1}This name Foudiki is missing in mss. A and B, and that of Sanou, which comes next, replaces that of the ms. A, Sagou, which has been reproduced in the printed text.< /note>

<note n="2}China, following mss. A and B.</note>

p. 31

<note n="1}Word for word: "people obeying the sultan". So it could also be translated as "serves."< /note>

p. 32

<note n="1}It is a common enough belief to think oneself safe from betrayal by one who has eaten with you. The prince no doubt feared that the saint would at some time wish to act against him.< /note>

p. 33

<note n="1}" The preacher of the mosque" who acted as referee.</note>

p. 34

<note n="1}This word, instead of being a proper noun, could be translated as "prolificator," but then it would have to have the definite article.</note>

<note n="2}That is, before the conquest of the Sudan by the Sultan of Morocco.</note>

<note n="3}Or Tinitâ'o.</note>

<note n="4}This name is missing from the list of mss. A and B.</note>

<note n="5}The mss. A and B give simply El-'Abbàs-Torſo. El-'Abbâs is here for Abu 'l-'Abbàs who often precedes the name Ahmed.< /note>

<note n="6}Bekar is short for Abu-Bekr, vulgarly pronounced Bou-Bakar.</note>

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<note n="1}So all the characters mentioned in these biographies were of Negro race.</note>