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OUR BULLETIN

This is the first issue of this scientific bulletin published by the Institute of African Studies—Cairo University.

The goal of this bulletin as apparent from the essays published here is purely academic. It is to publish recent researches either done by the specialized staff of the institute or by others. These researches deal with the different aspects of the continent of Africa.

Our Institute views this bulletin as a complement to its scientific mission, because—as a specialized institute, it aims foremost to encourage studies dealing with our continent and also to publish all new research and findings about it. Its aim is also to exchange this knowledge with other Institutes and Universities or other scientific bodies either in African Countries or anywhere else all over the world.

As we welcome this exchange of knowledge which serves our combined efforts, we hope that these studies about the African Continent, its inhabitants their activities, their civilization and their contributions towards the progress of mankind may always develop and grow.

Our Bulletin will be issued annually in June, but we hope that in the near future two issues will appear each year.

Editor

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THE EMPIRES OF WESTERN SUDAN

« A POLITICAL ANALYSIS »

By

HOREYA T. MEGAHED

امبراطوريات السودان الغربى

(تحليل سياسى)

من الخصائص الفريدة لغرب السودان قيام الامبراطوريات والممالك التى تميزت بتقدم نظمها الاجتماعية والسياسيه ، والتي تلت الواحدة الاخرى ، من القرن الثامن الميلادى الى الاستعمار الاوربى للمنطقة فى النصف الثانى من القرن التاسع عشر . وتميزت هذه الدول بانها دول غزو جاءت نتيجة قوة عسكرية ، وورثت كل منها الاخرى لذا فقد كانت بعيدة عن التجانس ، فضلا عن تميزها بمركزية السلطة - التى تلازم النظام السياسى متسع النطاق التى تمثلت فى وجود رئيس واحد كان يعتمد على التفوق العسكرى للاحتفاظ بالسلطة بالاضافة الى وجود ذلك فقد اعتمد مؤسسو الامبراطوريات على ما يبدو على بعض القوى الغيبية والدينية والنسب للاحتفاظ بسلطاتهم ، ولكن بالرغم من هذا فلم يكن الرئيس حاكما مطلقا بل كانت هناك حدود دستورية على سلطته فكان له مجلس وزراء ومستشارون يشاركون بفاعلية فى اتخاذ القرارات المتعلقة بالحكم فى الدولة .

وتميزت الامبراطوريات باللامركزية والتنظيم الادارى الهرمى : فضلا عن ظهور الدور السياسى للاسلام فى حياة هذه الامبراطوريات .

One of the unique characteristics of western Sudan is its successive hegemonies⁽¹⁾ with sophisticated social and political structures which dominated the scene and followed one after the other from the eighth century A.D. until the European conquest in the second half of the 19th century.

(1) *Hegemonies Soudanaises* as they were called by Beraud-Villars, *L'Empire de Gao* (Paris; Librairie Plon, 1942), p. 1.

Since the initiation of the tradition of Empire in the Western Sudan by the Ghana Empire in the early centuries A.D., there had been a continuation of this traditional experience ⁽¹⁾. This was demonstrated after the final collapse of the Ghana Empire in the thirteenth century ⁽²⁾ by the Mali Empire, which reached its apex in the fourteenth century and was apparently the most glorious and the wealthiest of all Western Sudanic empires. Then the Songhai Empire followed and dominated the scene from the end of the fifteenth century until it collapsed at the hands of the Moroccan army in 1591 ⁽³⁾. The collapse of the Songhai Empire marked the end of the era of the great medieval empires in Western Sudan. This does not mean, however, that the large scale political system disappeared from the area, what is meant is that the scale of the states became smaller. Thus the area witnessed the establishment of smaller scale states, particularly, the Bambara kingdoms of Segou and Kaarta, ⁽⁶⁾ and then the Peul Kingdom of Macina (1810—1862). ⁽⁴⁾ The empire of El Hadj Omar and his son Ahmadou, which collapsed on the hands of the French colonial army in the 90's of the nineteenth century, was the last expression of the large scale traditional systems and can be regarded as an unfinished scheme for establishing an empire similar in scale to those of the medieval time ⁽⁵⁾.

It is not intended here to go into details concerning the historical development of these states. There were, however, certain common aspects which they shared that will be discussed briefly in order to shed some light on this phenomenon of large scale political systems in the traditional pre-colonial era.

(1) The Concept of Empire, like that of civilization is vague enough to be stretched to include different forms. The main characteristics of an empire is the huge extension of power, usually by military force, over the existing political entities.

(2) The main source of information on Ghana Empire is El-Bekri, *Description de L'Afrique Septentrionale*, trans, M.R. de Slane (Algiers, 1913). See also J.D. Fage, «Ancient Ghana : A Review of the Evidence», *Tans. Hist. Soc. Ghana*, III, 2, (1957), 77—98 ; R. Mauny, «The Question of Ghana», *Africa*, XXIV, 1954.

(3) The main sources of information about Songhai Empire are : Es Sadi, *Tarikh Es Soudane* trans. by O. Hodas (Paris, 1900), and Kati, *Tarikh El Fettach*, trans. by Hodas & M. Delafosse (Paris, 1918). See also Beraud Villars, *op. cit.*, p. 211 ; Boulnois, Jean, and Hama Bouhou, *Empire e Gao : Histoire, Coutumes et Magie des Sonrai* (Paris : Librairie D'Amérique et d'Orient,, 1954), p. 182 ; J. Rouch, *Contribution à L'Histoire des Soghay* (Dakar : I.F.A.N. 29, 1953).

(4) For more details about the history of the Bambaras Kingdom, see : L. Tauxier, *Historie des Bambara* (Paris : Librairie Orientaliste, 1942), p. 227 ; A. Perignon, *Haut-Senegal et Moyen Niger : Kita et Segou* (Paris : J. André, 1901), p. 208.

(5) For details on the Peuls Kingdom see, Amadou Hampate Ba and J. Gadet, *L'Empire Peul du Macina*, Vol. I (Paris : Mouton, 1962) ; L. Tauxier, *Moeurs et Histoire des Peuls* (Paris : Payot, 1937).

(6) For El Hadj Omar Empire see, Mohammoud Aliou Tyam, *La Vie d'El Hadj Omar*. «Poem in Poular», transl. by Henri Gaden (Paris : Université de Paris, Institut d'Ethnologie 1937) ; P. Saleng, *La Vie d'El Hadj Omar*, (Paris : Bulletin du Comit éd'Etudes de IA.'O.Fc 1918).

The Common Characteristics of the Empires of Western Sudan

Despite the fact that these states differed in size, wealth, power, there are certain aspects that were common to all of them. These can be summarized in the following way :

Conquest States. The first main characteristic of the empires of Western Sudan is that each was a conquest state which developed into an empire as a result of military force. ⁽¹⁾ The common pattern is that an empire comes into existence as a result of the liberation and expansion of an already existing vassal kingdom ⁽²⁾ The empire of El Hadj Omar, however, was a deviation from this rule, since it did not result from the expansion of an existing kingdom but was primarily the creation of El Hadj Omar himself. It belongs to what Delafosse called *Empire de hasard*. ⁽³⁾ Each of these kingdoms which formed in itself a nucleus for an empire, was based on the core of an ethnic group; it is when the kingdom, or more specifically, the ethnic group which composed it, under the leadership of a ruling clan spread to conquer the other ethnic groups and the surrounding territories that the empire came into existence. Thus at the heart of each empire there is a centralized core of one ethnic group ⁽⁴⁾.

The point that is of interest here is that every one of the major ethnic groupings in the area of Western Sudan was the central core of one or the other of these empires, i.e., it retains the glorious past of having been the founder of one of the

(1) The importance which these empires gave to the army was remarkable. The cavalry, namely the horses which they imported from Northern Africa, was the main basis of the supremacy of the army, particularly in the medieval empires. Moreover the fleets in the Niger, contribute to the supremacy of the Songhai and mainly the Bambara of Segou, who through the organization of its military fleets were able to conquer Macina. Furthermore, with the introduction of firearms to Africa at the arrival of the Europeans, these became the major element in the supremacy of the 19th century's Empire of El Hadj Omar.

(2) For instance Mali Kingdom was vassal to Ghana and to the Sosso and it was liberated by the hand of Soudiate Keita and expanded in all directions to include its former oppressors, i.e. Ghana and Sosso ; it also included the Tekroun, the Songhai, the Macina, Segou. When the Songhai Kingdom, which was a vassal to Mali Empire, was liberated by the hand of Ali Kolen and started to spread under the Dynasty of the Sonni and then the Askia, it included the major parts of the Mali Empire particularly the Macina, the Bamaras. When the Bambara liberated themselves under Biton Koulibaly from the Songhai and the Armas, they conquered Macina.

(3) See Delafosse, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 142.

(4) The nucleus of Ghana Empire was the Kingdom of Ougadou, for Mali, the kingdom of Mali or Mellel or the Mandingue, for Songhai, the kingdom of Songhai mainly in the region of Dendi. Macina was the nucleus for the Paul Kingdom. As to El Hadj Omar, he started from Dinguiraye. William J. Foltz, *From French West Africa to the Mali Federation* (New Haven and London : Yale University Press, 1965), p. 4.

successive empires. In the Ghana Empire, although it was believed that its birth as a kingdom was the product of African non-negroid elements, ⁽¹⁾ the Sarakoles, who represented the base of the empire, took over the power in the eighth century, and it was under their rule that Ghana expanded and reached its apex in the tenth century. Thus, the Sarakoles are connected with the memories of the Ghana Empire. The Malinkes are the founders of the Mali Empire. And the Bambaras, with an admixture of Peuls in the ruling aristocracy, established the kingdoms of Segou and Kaarta. The Peuls were the founders of the Macina Kingdom. The Toucouleurs retain the memories of the Empire of El-Hadj Omar and his son Ahmadou.

Actually, each empire contributed to the destruction and in general to the domination of the empire that had just previously occupied the place of supremacy in Western Sudanic area. The main reason for such conquest and domination in the pre-nineteenth century hegemonies was the desire for controlling trade, particularly with the North, which was the source of great prosperity for the medieval empires. ⁽²⁾ The conquest of the nineteenth century states, particularly that of El Hadj Omar, was accomplished primarily in the name of Islam and not in the name of trade, as had been the case of the preceding states.

As a result of the conquest, the empires of Western Sudan were far from being homogeneous. They included political units and ethnic groupings that had no ties in common. This cultural heterogeneity, however, is the essence of empire, generally speaking. Furthermore, it might be mentioned that the western Sudanic empires in their expansion did not cover exactly the same area, the same people or even the whole present-day Mali, but the fact remains that they were all, more or less, based on the Upper Niger and that they dominated the great part of the Western Sudanic area ⁽³⁾ The one that covered the largest

(1) The origin of these white elements is not known, but it is believed that they were either proto-Peuls or Lybian-Berbers. Es Sadi, *op. cit.*, mentioned on p. 18, about the early white dynasty of Ghana and how their origin is not known. He also mentioned that the number of the kings who succeeded to the throne was forty-four before and after the *Hegira*.

(2) Trade was primarily in gold of which the Western Sudan had the largest deposit. The trans-Saharan trade routes to which the northern cities of the empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai were the outposts or the ports on the Sahara, extended further south, but in the hands of the Dioulas traders, from Djenne until it reached the gold mines in the Ashanti. For details on the conquest and the trade, see John Fage, «Some Thoughts of State-Formation in the Western Sudan Before the 17th Century,» in Jeffery Butler, *African History*, Vol. I (Boston : Boston University, 1964), pp. 19—33; E.W. Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors* (London : Oxford University Press, 1958).

(3) The Ghana Empire was primarily in the Sahel, which was not as dry as it is now; it reached to Senegal and did not go beyond Upper Niger, but it went as far as Djenne; to the North, it extended to Ouadoghost (of Wadagost); Songhai went as far as Mopti there were still some remnants of Mali, but it was strong in the west where it conquered the Eastern part of Hausaland, and in the North it included the Air.

area (most of the territory of present-day Mali plus peripheral) areas was the Mali Empire, which reached at its apex the Atlantic in the West, Hausaland in the East, Mossi land in the South, and which extended its influence deep into the desert up to Air. Finally, one should note that the empires of Western Sudan, particularly those of the medieval time at their climax, did not cover only the area of the Western Sudanic circle but they went beyond to that of the Desert area, when their influence expanded deep into the desert.⁽¹⁾

The Centralization of Authority.—The second characteristic of the empires of Western Sudan is the centralization of authority, which is, in fact, the essence of the large scale political system in Africa. This centralization of authority is defined as the existence of « a single leader who delegates authority to representatives in charge of the territorial units into which the country is divided »⁽²⁾.

By applying this definition to the empires of Western Sudan, one can find that the main aspect of the centralization of authority in all the successive states in the area is that each had a single leader who was the head of the state and the symbol for the empire. Whether the head was known as Tounka (in the Ghana Empire), Mansa (in Mali), Sonni or Askia (in Songhai), Massassi (in Kaarta), Fama (in Segou) or Almamy (in the Peul Kingdom), the title made no difference as long as he was the depository of supreme authority and sovereignty belonged only to him. The emperor, or the head of the state, was chosen from a royal clan. The lineage system was seemingly patrilineal in all the empires, with the exception of Ghana where matrilineal descent was the rule. This was particularly the result of the impact of Islam. Thus, the Tounka of Ghana was chosen from the Sisse Tounkara family⁽³⁾. In Mali, the Mansa, was chosen from the Keita family. In Songhai, the leader came from the dynasty of Sonni and then from that of the Askia⁽⁴⁾. The Massassi of Segou was chosen from the Koulibaly family ; the Almamy of the Peul Kingdom were from Bari dynasty.

(1) For instance Ghana Empire conquered Ouadaghost; Mali Empire expanded even further to include Walata (or Oualata); and the Songhai Empire was the uncontested master of the salt mines of Toghata.

(2) Jan Vansina, «A Comparison of African Kingdoms», *Africa*, Vol. 32, International African Institute, 1962, pp. 324—34.

(3) As Mamby Sidibé, in *Le Mali d'Autrefois*, mimeographed, unpub., (Bamako, «n.d.»), bp. 5, said, they were always nephews (sons of the sisters) of the family of Kaya Maghan.

(4) The norm was that the head was chosen from the founding ruling dynasty, but in some cases this dynasty was overthrown by usurpers, as in the case of Askia Mohamed (1493—1529), who overthrew the Sonni, the descendent of the legitimate royal clan, and established the dynasty of the Askias. The word Askia in Songhaic means «it is not his», («il ne l'est pas.») See Villars, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

In addition to the sword, or the military supremacy, which was apparently the most effective means for the legitimation of authority, it is interesting to note that the heads of the empires had some kind of supra-natural mythical power. It is true that the divine kingship which existed in Ghana Empire seemingly disappeared from this area of Western Sudan in the succeeding kingdoms as a result of the spread of Islam, particularly among the rulers, but this does not mean that some mythical ideas about the genealogy of the ruler did not remain. The attempt to link with holy Islamic origin became the typical phenomenon.

A manifestation of this can be found in the Mali Empire. The tradition in Mali held that the ancestor of the Keitas of the royal family in Mali Empire came from Arabia, i.e., where Islam originated. But besides the quality of kingship, Soundiata Keita, the founder of the Empire, was said to possess some supra-natural power.

In the Songhai Empire, Askia Mohamed, under whom the Empire reached its apex, was designated by the Sherif of Mecca, Maulay El Abbas, as the Khalifa of all the Sudan in the sense that he was considered as the eleventh Khalifa after the prophet Mohamed⁽¹⁾. Seikou Hamadou, the founder of the Peul Kingdom, was designated as the twelfth Khalifa⁽²⁾.

As to the last empire, El-Hadj Omar was named the head of the Tijaniyya sect⁽³⁾, and his son succeeded him as the ruler as well as the head of the sect. He also had the prestige of being the son of a marabout—Omar Tall—and son in law of the prestigious Othman dan Fodio of Nigeria.

But the important point that should be made here is that the head of the state, as a rule, was never an absolute monarch⁽⁴⁾. Although he was the symbol of the supreme authority and power, this does not mean that his power was unlimited. There were «constitutional» limitations upon his power. The emperor was always surrounded by his council of ministers and advisors who balanced his influence. These did not have mere advisory power, but they in fact participated and shared in the important decisions of governing the state. Such examples of «collective decision-making» and advising in the medieval empires

(1) Kati, *op. cit.*, Chapter 1 on the Khalifat.

(2) See *Ibid.*

(3) John D. Hargreaves, *Prelude to the Partation of West Africa* (New York : Macmillan and Co., 1963), pp. 9—11; Trimmingham, *Islam in West Africa* (London : Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 97—98.

(4) Delafosse, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 6.

of Ghana, Mali and Songhai can be noted from some scattered reports of the Arab writers ⁽¹⁾. But the crystallization of this collegial character of decision-making occurred in the Peul Kingdom, where Seikou Hamadou was the founder and head, but the decisions were in the domain of the Great Council and its inner core (The Great Council was composed of forty members of the *Ulama*, while the central core was composed of three chosen by the former, and included Seikou Hamadou). The *Almamy*, i.e. the head, was surrounded by *El Moustahiboun* ⁽²⁾ (of the religious leaders and notables). In short, one can say without hesitation that the rule in leadership of Western Sudanic empires was collective decision-making and the absence of absolute leadership.

In addition to the single leader, the other main characteristic of the centralization of authority is the delegation of power by the leader to the local chiefs. The leader was at the head of the administrative machinery, and below him there was a hierarchy of chieftaincy. At the very base of this hierarchy was the village chief who controlled a number of chiefs of extended families; the next level was the *canton* chief or district chief who controlled a number of *villagé* chiefs, and above that was a provincial chief and occasionally a king, who controlled a number of district chiefs ⁽³⁾.

The question is, how were these empires administered? In other words, what was the basis for the delegation of authority from the emperor, or the head of the state, to the inferior chiefs? In answering this question one should make it clear first that there is a lack of sufficient information to build a comprehensive analysis, particularly on the earlier empires. However, it is more likely that there were two levels of administration: A direct one in the nucleus from which the empire started, and indirect rule in the annexed territories (outlying areas) included in the empire as a result of its expansion ⁽⁴⁾. In the former, direct rule was represented in the placing of members of the ruling clan and the retainers of the emperor as chiefs of the provinces which composed the central core ⁽⁵⁾. Thus it was more likely that kin linkage was the rule as the basis of authority in the central cores of the medieval empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai. This was,

(1) Kati, *op. cit.*, mentioned how the Askira called a re-union of his council, which was composed of the *Ulama*, the notables, and the chief of his army, to consult them on what was to be done about the Islamization of the pagans, p. 103.

(2) Hampaté Ba *op. cit.*, pp. 6—10.

(5) For more details about the political units, see M. Delafosse, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 124—45.

(4) For the theoretical framework and terminology see Vansina, *op. cit.*, pp. 324—30.

(5) See J.S. Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa* (London: Oxford University Press 1962), pp. 76—77; Mamby Sidibé, *Histoire du Mali, Deuxième Partie*, mimeographed paper, (Bamko, n.d.), p. 24.

however, modified to a greater extent in more recent succeeding states of Western Sudan. A new basis of authority, like religious discipline and military process, started to appear. Thus in the kingdom of Segou military prowess became the foundation for appointing the provincial chiefs regardless of their clan or social status. For instance, the *Ton-Dion*, who were appointed as the provincial chiefs by Biton Koulibaly, the founder of the kingdom, were primarily slaves from his disciplined army in which membership was open to everyone without exception ⁽¹⁾. Moreover, in the Peul Kingdom, the basic criterion for appointing an *Amiru* or governor was the literacy in Arabic and religious orthodoxy ⁽²⁾.

As to the outlying territories, it is more likely that after they were conquered, they were in most cases left under their chiefs who were reduced to vassals under the emperor. In other words, the emperor delegated the political and administrative authority to the conquered chiefs who became dependent on him and who showed their dependency by paying tributes. Thus, the creation of the empire did not mean that there were no other political units allowed within its boundaries; what it does mean is that the sovereignty belonged to the head of the state—the emperor—and other inferior political units (even kingdoms) could continue to exist, but only as subject or administrative units responding to the demands of the highest sovereign and showing their subjection by paying tributes. There was, however, some manifestation of protocorporate principles even in the medieval empires, represented by the appointment of a Viceroy of the emperor — *Fariba* in Mali Empire, and *Farin* in Songhai Empire — in the provincial divisions into which the empires were divided ⁽³⁾, to act as the eye of the head of the state in watching over the affairs of the annexed territories and supervising the collection of taxes. These local representatives were not primarily from the ruling clan, as in the case of the nuclear area, but were mainly from the same ethnic group of the emperor. In addition to this delegation of the political and administrative authority, there was also a delegation of military authority to the army generals who were responsible for keeping order and defending the empire. These generals were not exclusively from the royal clan. For instance, Mamadou Touré, who was the general of Sonni Ali in the Songhai Empire and who took over the power to establish the Askia Dynasty, was not Songhai but Sarakole.

(28) The kingdom of Segou was divided into sixty provinces, on top of each a *Ton Dion*. See A. Bime, *Notes Africaines*, No. 75, Dakar, IFAN.

(29) See Hampaté Ba, *op. cit.*,

(30) Kati, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

Thus, apart from the direct rule in the nuclear area of the empires, particularly in medieval times, indirect rule was the norm, and the head of the states interfered little in the affairs of the local units of the outlying areas. The ruling clan was primarily interested in keeping order and getting tribute. The administrative units of the empires corresponded more or less to the ethnic or tribal groupings within them, i.e., they were inter-tribal and not cross-tribal empires ⁽¹⁾. And the masses were left more or less untouched ; the contact was with the provincial chief. In other words, there was no national feeling, and centralization of authority was rather fictitious. This, however, was not the case of the Empire of El Hadj Omar, who established an administrative structure which cut across tribal bases and which was not based on kinship linkage. The conquered territories were divided into districts on territorial bases ; on the top of each was placed a *talibé* who was a religious as well as a political disciple ⁽²⁾. Even the village chiefs were replaced in many cases by an outsider chief—*sofa*—appointed by the head of the state ⁽³⁾. Recruitment to the system was open to all ; rank was decided according to the religious integrity of the individuals, but a large number of the imposed rulers were from the Toucouleurs compatriots of El Hadj Omar. Thus the empire of El Hadj Omar was actually an intensive movement toward the unification of all the people in Western Sudan on the basis of Islam's cutting across all ethnic and parochial ties. This centralized power, and the direct interference in the affairs of the conquered territories might explain the reason why the imposition of El Hadj Omar Empire was resented by the conquered people, particularly the Bambara pagans and Moslem Quadriyya Peuls of Macina Kingdom, while the earlier empires avoided such imposition and thus minimized the troubles of empire building.

In short one might say, that the last phase of the large-scale political systems in Western Sudan, exemplified by the empire of El Hadj Omar, was marked by the development toward a corporate principle, a more impersonal government and a real centralization of power. It was, as one might call it, an attempt of a proto-nation-state building.

The Political Role of Islam. The significant political role which Islam played is another common characteristic shared by the empires of Western Sudan ⁽⁴⁾. It is true that the importance of this role increased as the time went on, but the

(1) This terminology was applied by Foltz, *op. cit.*, pp. 2—9.

(2) See Delafosse *op. cit.*, II, pp. 341—51.

(3) See *Ibid.*, III, p. 131; Hargreaves, *op. cit.*, pp. 122—24.

(4) For the role of Islam see J.S. Trimingham, *op. cit.*; Fage, *op. cit.*, pp. 19—33. There is also some account in Vincent Monteil, *l'Islam Noir* (Paris : Collections Esprit, 1964), mainly op. 58—90; and J.C. Froelich, *Les Musulmans d'Afrique Noire* (Paris : éditions de l'Oranteo 1962), pp. 17—69.

sign of such influence was noticeable even in the first empire of Ghana. Despite the fact that before 1076 the emperor (in the latter) was not Moslem, he chose the majority of his ministers among the Moslems ⁽¹⁾. Moreover, there was a large number of Moslem Arab and Berber traders in the capital. The conquest of the Ghana Empire by Almoravides in 1076 was the real landmark for the beginning of the Islamization of Western Sudanic area ⁽²⁾. Despite the fact that this conquest did not last for more than twelve years (Ghana gained its independence, though declining, in 1088), it resulted in the thorough Islamization of the rulers of Ghana and its Sarakole people, as well as those of the surrounding areas ⁽³⁾. This trend was carried over in the succeeding empires.

In the Mali Empire, the ruling class as well as their retainers were Moslems. Reference can be made to the several pilgrimages which the Malian leaders made to Mecca ⁽⁴⁾. Moreover, Mansa Moussa, after his famous trip to Mecca in 1355, made considerable efforts to spread Islam. Mosques, Koranic schools, and universities were established in Timbuctu, Gao, and Djenne ⁽⁵⁾. Thus Islam began to spread not just among the rulers and their retainers, but to the subjects, particularly in Urban centers ⁽⁶⁾. There was no indication, however, of a systematic attempt by the rulers to spread Islam outside the urban centers.

As to the Songhai Empire, it is believed that its rulers and people became more thoroughly Islamized than the Mali Empire. The reference is always made to Sonni Ali, the real founder of the Empire, and his anti-Islamic policy and persecution of the *Ulama*, i.e., the Moslem scholars⁽⁷⁾. This, however, was explained by his fear of the foreign influence that might come through religion ⁽⁸⁾ (mainly that the *Ulama* resented his conquest of Timbuctu). He accused them of being allied to the Tuareg against him. Also, he desired to establish a separate

(1) El Bekri, *op. cit.*, pp. 327—31.

(2) See also R. Cornevin, *Histoire de l'Afrique, Tome I* (Paris : Payot, 1962), pp. 62, 295—99.

(3) Fage, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

(4) It is believed that since the Islamization of the king of «Melle» at the hands of a Lemtouna trader, as El Bekri reported, *op. cit.*, p. 331, the rulers have been Moslems. The traditions in Mali support that the first Moslem king was Baramendana Keita and that after he became Moslem, he went on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1050.

(5) See Al Omari, *op. cit.*, p. 53 and *passim*.

(6) It was reported by Ibn Babutahat that the peoples in Niani, the capital, were thoroughly Moslem, and that they were prompt in praying and that they forced their children to do it. That during Friday prayers the crowd was so large in the Mosque that one had to go early to find a place to stand. See Ibn Batuta, *Voyages*, «Arabic text accomp. by Frencho transl.» Paris : 1949), IV, p. 421.

(7) See Villars *op. cit.*, pp. 52—53— and El Moucheli, transl. by F. Dubois, *Tomboucto la Mysterieuse*, Paris, p. 122; Sadi, *op. cit.*, pp. 104—109.

(8) See *Ibid.*, p. 109.

identity from the former dominating Empire, Mali, whose leaders were identified with Islam ⁽¹⁾. But this policy was reversed by his successor Askia Mohamed, who made great efforts to spread Islam beyond urban centers and went as far as declaring a holy war against the Mossi pagans ⁽²⁾. He increased relations with the Islamic world. During his pilgrimage to Mecca, he was installed by the Sherif of Mecca, Maulay El Abbas, as the Khalif of all the Sudan ⁽³⁾. The influence of the Ulama in advising the rulers in decision-making increased considerably by the end of the 16th century ⁽⁴⁾, and the Moslem scholars and religious men enjoyed special positions. The *Qadi* (Moslem jurist), for instance had a special position in Songhai Empire. He was the only one in the Empire, other than the Askia, who had the right to order and be fully obeyed like the Askia. It is also mentioned that the Askia stood only for the Ulama, the Sherif, and those coming back from the pilgrimage. He allowed them to eat with him ⁽⁵⁾

The spread of Islam came to a halt, however, after the Moroccan invasion in 1591, which resulted in the collapse of Songhai Empire and the destruction of the Islamic centers in Timbuctu, Djenné, Gao, and the dispersion of the *Ulama*. It was during this period that the pagan Bambara states developed in Segou and Kaarta. But this did not last, however, for too long, since Western Sudan in the 19th century witnessed a new phase marked by the creation of theocratic states by religious leaders. Thus the Peul Kingdom was established as an ideal Islamic state *Dina* by Seikou Hamadou who was a marabout and a son of a marabout in the Qadriyya sect. He was designated as the Khalif—*Amir el-muminin*—which gave him a spiritual influence ⁽⁶⁾.

This new phenomenon of establishing theocratic states having Islam as the base of the state was developed more extensively in the second half of the nineteenth century by El-Hadj Omar. He gained considerable prestige as the head of the Tijaniyya as well as from more than two decades of traveling and studying in Mecca and Al Azhar (in Cairo). He attracted many followers to his reforming confraternity that was operated primarily on equalitarian principles. Thus he was able to formulate a considerable military state by the support of his

(1) Fage, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

(2) Kati, *op. cit.*, p. 16

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 16.

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 14.

(5) *Ibid.*, p. 15.

(6) Khalif means successor or *Imam*. The Prophet predicted 12 khalif to come after him, two of the Sudan. Thus as the Sherif of Mecca Said, Askia Mohamed is the eleventh khalif. And the prediction was also made of the twelfth khalif, who was Sekou Amadou, the founder of the Peul Kingdom in the nineteenth century.

disciples with the primary goal of propagating Islam and the Tijaniyya ⁽¹⁾. El Hadj Omar and his son Ahmadu, who carried on the leadership after him, were engaged in intensive holy war against the pagans in the name of Islam. Actually, El Hadj Omar's Empire was an unfinished scheme for the unification and the total Islamization of Western Sudan by the use of force. It was the French conquest which put a definite end to this scheme and to the holy war.

Thus Islam in its relation to the state developed from the religion of a minority and some ministers and advisors of the emperors of Ghana in the eleventh century to the religion of the state and the rulers of Mali and Songhai empires, and lastly, to become the *raison d'être* and the main ideology of the theocratic Foul Kingdom and the more extensive empire of El Hadj Omar in the nineteenth century.

Islam, in fact, gave the pulse and the rationale for the aggrandizement of the empires ; this is particularly noticed in the modern phases ⁽²⁾. It gave the leaders spiritual supremacy, enabling them to consolidate the power. In the meantime, it gave the technique of bureaucratic machinery for administering the empires ⁽³⁾. It also played an indirect integrative role in the fragile empires of Mali and Songhai, and a more direct positive role in the 19th century's states ⁽⁴⁾. But more important, it gave a feeling of belonging to a universal cult which helped the leaders to think on a universal rather than tribal parochial scale in their state-building. Furthermore, it intensified the relations with North Africa and opened the landlocked area to the Islamic civilization, and Islamic World ⁽⁵⁾. Finally, Islam was an effective policy of the state for the intensification of the trade relations with the Islamic North, which was the main source for the great prosperity of the medieval empires. It is true that trade was carried on, particularly trade in gold which was the main source of wealth to its holder, the Empire of Ghana, long before Islam became the religion of the state in Mali Empire

(1) Hargreaves, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

(2) Foltz, *op. cit.*, p. 4, applied that on the expansion of Mali Empire.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 5.

(4) La Documentation Française, *Le Problème des Chefferies en Afrique Noire Française*, Notes et Etudes Documentaires (February 10, 1959), pp. 5-6.

(5) This resulted in the existence in the courts of the emperors of the medieval time of high personalities from North Africa and the Islamic world. For instance, Es Saheli, an outstanding poet and architect from North Africa, was in the court of Askia Mohamed. He lived in Mali Empire until the end of his life. Another important example is that the Sherif of Mecca, Maulai El Abbas, after instituting Askia Mohamed as the Klalif of the Sudan, sent his cousin, Sherif Ahmed Es Segli, to live beside the Askia where he lived until he died, as well as his sons. Kati, *op. cit.*, p. 25. This resulted in having descendents of the Shorafa (plural of Sherif) who became mixed with the local population but are still considered as aristocracy there.

but the fact remains, however, that this trade was increased after the pilgrimages of the rulers. Thus along with their fame in the Islamic world, trade and prosperity increased, too.

From what preceded, one can see that the Western Sudanic circle developed a highly sophisticated political system characterized by the development of succeeding large-scale states with a hierarchy of authority and a high degree of civilization. The idea of empire-building was diffused from one ethnic group, which became an empire builder, to another ethnic group in the area. The succeeding states and empires should be considered as interconnected links in the long chain of the state system in the area which in its final pre-colonial phase developed into proto-nation state building.

The society of the Western Sudanic area was characterized by a highly instrumental value system which made the people very receptive to change. The basic influence on the area came from the outside, namely from the caucasoid white elements of North Africa. The point of importance is that while there was a great capacity to absorb the outside influence and culture and to use them as instruments for the development of the neo-Sudanic system, there was simultaneously a great capacity to eliminate or absorb the white alien elements which transmitted the influence or initiated political development in the area ⁽¹⁾. The best example for this instrumental value system is found in the Sarakoles of the Ghana Empire who eliminated the white founders after learning from them the techniques of governing a large-scale political system and then proceeded to develop a sophisticated system which resulted in the first empire building in Western Sudan. It is interesting to notice that the Sarakoles, including the Dioulas, who were the first to come into contact with the white traders of North Africa and were also the first to become well Islamized by Almoravids, absorbed knowledge of both trade and Islam and made them parts of their traditions. When they dispersed, they became simultaneously the propagators of Islam as well as the traders *par excellence* in West Africa. The idea of empire building was diffused, particularly among the Mande people, and the succession of empires that proceeded.

To sum up, one might say that the neo-Sudanic civilization resulted, in fact from an overstructure of paleo-Mediterranean or North-African Islamic culture ; however, the civilization and architecture—particularly in the medieval empires—remained Sudanic in content. The society remained similar to the neighboring paleo-Nigrific ones in the forest area of the Ivory Coast for instance where large-

(1) The elimination of the white elements was done in the Ghana Empire when the Sarakoles took over the power from the caucasoid elements who initiated the state system there. The absorption was done, for instance, in the case of the Songhai Empire, Bambara kingdoms, and the descendants of the Moroccan conquest army, the *Alma*.

scale political systems did not develop. The largest society for the individual was the village, which was the basic politico-administrative unit of the large scale system. The village was a real community, based on the organic ties of all individuals in it. There was no place for the individual outside the community in which he was a member of a family, age group, clan, and village, and not a solitary individual. The individual had horizontal loyalty to all these primary traditional social institutions, and there was no real vertical loyalty transcending that of the village apart from the unfinished attempts of the late 19th century to create politico-Islamic loyalty. The traditional society was functional by nature and communal in character.

The Impact of the Large Scale Political System.—In concluding this part about the phenomenon of the traditional large-scale political system in the Western Sudanic area, it should be stressed that its complex historical development left important landmarks which in turn might have influenced greatly the process of nation building in present day Mali.

1. The most important outcome is the population dispersion. This resulted primarily from the conquest. Thus, for instance, the Srakoles with the collapse of their Ghana Empire dispersed along the natural route of the Niger and down until they reached the Ashanti. The Peuls who were believed to be in the area of Senegal at the time of Almoravides' conquest dispersed into a huge area in the center of present-day Mali. The dispersion weakened ethnic boundaries. For instance, among the Bambara, which represent the largest ethnic group in the area (25 per cent), it is hard to identify one block of pure Bambara ethnic grouping ⁽¹⁾. Ethnic groupings, in fact, do not have real territorial boundaries. Thus tribalism, in the sense of a large concentration of an ethnic group, which is a familiar case in Africa in general, has no significance ; it is rather regionalism which is more significant. Ethnicity in fact became blurred so that a person can easily change his ethnic affiliation by changing his functional activity, religion or family name (diamou) ⁽²⁾.

2. The traditional society was characterized by a complex social stratification system, a natural result of the population movement and the succession of conquest states ⁽³⁾. The common pattern does not differ considerably from

(1) Pagues, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

(2) Jean Gallais, «Signification du Groupe Ethnique au Mali,» in *L'Homme*, Tome 11, No. 2 (May-August, 1962), pp. 106-29, see mainly pp. 107-10.

(3) The stratification system was sharper among the Mandes than the Peuls, for instance but the same picture prevailed among all the major ethnic groupings. Among the Bambaras the slaves were not outcasts, but they were essential elements in the society and took an active role in the army and defense. Among the Mande, the military noble class (tontigi) was at the top, free men (horo or woro), the real caste (called nyama kala), and then the captives and slaves. In the Peuls' theocratic state, at the top were the politico-military and religious chiefs, free men, the caste group (neybe), and the serf (rimaibé).

that prevailing in the Desert area (although it is based in general on ethnic rather than on racial basis). At the top of the echelon, there were the warrior nobles or chiefs, and at the very bottom, there were the serfs and captives (who represented the menial group in the society). Between these two levels of social hierarchy were the free men, followed by a typical Soudanese endogamous caste group composed of the blacksmiths ⁽¹⁾, whose wives were pottery makers, the leather workers, the fishermen, and the *griots* (or praise singers, who were attached primarily to the ruling group) ⁽²⁾. The point is that there has been social prohibition of marriage between a member of the noble or the free-men class and some «inferior» classes since the Mali Empire ⁽³⁾. Another significant point is that agricultural work, particularly among the Bambaras and the Malinkes, was in the domain of free-man, since it was considered honorable and purifying. (It was mainly the Peuls who left agriculture to their captives, the Rimaibés). These two aspects are important since in present-day Mali the leaders have been fighting against the former, and trying to revive the latter.

3. The importance of trade since the medieval empires created a trade linkage and coherence between the Western Sudanic area and the North, on the one hand, and between the former and the neighboring areas of the forest and Guinea Coast, on the other hand. The strategic intermediate position of the Western Sudanic area between the North and the forest helped it in controlling trade and enabled it later to acquire the title of the «crossroads of French West Africa» ⁽⁴⁾. The trade tradition developed (or flourished) primarily under the «pax Soudanaïsa» which the empires, particularly those of the medieval time, established. The initial trade linkage was with North Africa by means of the Arabs and Tuareg Berbers through the trans-Saharan trade routes. As to the trade across the Western Sudanic area and to the South, it was developed by the Mande speaking people, namely the Sarakoles, including the Dioulas, who dispersed with the collapse of the Ghana Empire, mainly along the natural route of the Niger. They established their trading cities in Djenne and down to Bobo, Kong, and Bego ; i.e., they reached down to the Ashanti and in doing so, they connected the trans-Saharan trade with this new axis ⁽⁵⁾. As the trans-Saharan trade died off, the linkage with the South and the Atlantic coast became more

(1) The blacksmiths had an importance, since they were also «medicins» and sorcerers ; they influenced the masses.

(2) The *griot* is also known as *duelle*, *dyeli*.

(3) Kati, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-22. See Hampâte Bâ, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11 ; Pagnès, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.

(4) Foltz, *op. cit.*, p. 44 ; see Fage, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-31.

(5) See Ivor Wilks, *The Northern Factor in Ashanti History* (Léghon : University of Ghana Institute of African Studies, 1961).

important. The Mande speaking traders or the Dioulas as they came to be known, worked as transmitters of the ideas in the Soudan as well as the neighboring countries. They spread Islam as far down as the northern part of present-day Ghana. In the post Second World War period, they acted as active propagators of political ideas, particularly those of the R.D.A. ⁽¹⁾. The trade linkage and the special position of the Soudan as the crossroads of West Africa influenced the Malian leaders to think in terms of interterritorial unity, rather than national independence. Moreover, the traditional importance of the Dioulas in trade made them later hostile to the Malian government policy of socialism and government control over trade before the 1968 coup d'état.

4. The Western Sudanic empires established an urban tradition ⁽²⁾ which developed not only around trade but also around Islamic culture. The important urban centers like Timbuctu, Gao, and Djenne resulted primarily from the increase of the trans-Saharan trade for which these centers were the important ports. Moreover, more recent southern cities, like Segou and Sikasso developed on the trade axis to the South. The Urban centers manifested a high degree of civilization and were important axes for the diffusion of Islamic and Arabic culture into West Africa. They were real cosmopolitan areas which reached a high degree of material, as well as intellectual and moral, civilization and which flourished in the second half of the fourteenth century. Islamic libraries and universities were established particularly in Timbuctu and Djenne where intensive philosophical, theological, and juristic studies were directed. Thus the cities included a large number of *Ulama* and students in addition to the traders⁽³⁾. These urban centers helped to some extent in weakening tribal and traditional ties among their dwellers who were very mixed and established instead a universal tie of Islam. The urban tradition gave Mali a unique flavor of the combination of old and new. It might be noted that the style of architecture which one finds all over the urban centers in Mali, called the «Soudanic style», *style Soudanais* had its origin in the fourteenth century (when it was introduced by Es Sahell, the North African architect who was brought by Askia Mohamed to establish the mosques of Djenne, Timbuctu, and Gao) ⁽⁴⁾.

(1) «Rassemblement Democratique Africain», the most important inter-territorial Party in French West-Africa before independence.

(2) The term «urban tradition» was used by Professors T. Hodgkin and R. Morgenthau «Mali» in J. Coleman and C. Rosberg, *Political Parties and National Inregtation in Tropical Africa* (Berkeley, : California University Press, 1964). See pp. 221-22.

(3) See Ruth S.Morgenthau, *Political Parties in French-Speaking West Africa* (London : Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 262-63.

(4) «L'Influence de l'Islam sur L'Art au Sahara et au Soudan,» *La Documentation Photo- graphique*, Paris, dossier No. 55-16, 1963, p. 4.

5. The spread of Islam provided the important force of cohesion between the population and provided a strong spiritual link between the Western Sudanic ethnographic circle and that of the Desert area. Furthermore, the Arabic language is used in the northern part of the country up to Timbuctu ; it is the second written language in Mali.

Finally, the fact that Mali—unlike the majority of the African states—had a long, glorious history behind it enabled the leaders to find a myth in their past on which to build national unity.

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