

Not yet Songhay*

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The medieval history of West Africa is still a subject neglected by research. Serious attempts to deal with it require the knowledge of Arabic. However, for general Arabists and specialists of Islamic studies, it is too marginal to the Islamic World to be studied in depth, whereas for African historians the knowledge of Arabic required by the study of texts presents a serious barrier. John Hunwick is one of the few Arabists who devoted his full energy to this field. His numerous and substantial publications made him a major authority on the history of the Middle Niger, a region more blessed with diverse Arabic sources than Ghana and Mali in the west or Kanem-Borno in the east. But this diversity of sources implies different perspectives and, hence, generates different interpretations. Therefore, his new contribution to the Middle Niger or Songhay history in the form of an interpretative essay published together with a number of text translations in *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire* deserves special attention.

Hunwick's essay on Songhay history gives me the opportunity to look once more into the history of the Middle Niger. Some time ago, there was a lengthy debate in *The Journal of African History* between John Hunwick and myself concerning various aspects of Songhay history.¹ Then I argued, as the title of my contribution shows, for a re-evaluation of the history of the Middle Niger in terms of ethnic history. This implied a critical stand towards the current view that the Songhay inhabited the Middle Niger and in particular Gao since the beginning of the trans-Saharan trade.² By defining the Songhay solely in terms of their language, Hunwick believes that the Songhay were the original inhabitants

of the eastern Middle Niger, while I suggested that the Mande people occupied this region prior to the Songhay. As a matter of fact, now the discussion mainly concentrates on the question of ethnicity: May we call the people of the eastern Middle Niger Songhay, if the name was introduced by eastern rebels against Mande rule only at a later stage? This discussion is not only a matter of names and of a hypothetical uprising against Mande rule. It also concerns the supposed earliest polity of the Songhay at Kukiya. Two recent studies of mine, overlooked by Hunwick, suggested that Mande influence on the Middle Niger can be traced from the second half of the eleventh century since the kings of the stelae of Gao-Sané belonged to the Zā dynasty which – in my opinion – originated not in Kukiya, downstream of Gao, but in Tendirma or Ancient Ghana, upstream of Gao. I further intimated that the Zarma, who also originated in Ancient Ghana, derived from the Zā.³ Without going into details about these questions, I would like to examine Hunwick's new publication in order to see whether he has modified the orthodox view of Songhay history.

I shall begin with an outline of the introductory chapter of *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire* titled "Songhay, an interpretative essay".⁴ It deals with the period extending from the ninth century, to which the author dates the beginning of Gao, up to the sixteenth century when the Askiya dynasty made Songhay the most powerful kingdom of the Sahel. Besides this periodical coverage, the essay includes lengthy subchapters on the Askiyate, on the "religious estate" and on al-Sa'dī, the author of *Ta'riḫ al-Sūdān*. The shortcomings of the exposé consist – for the earlier periods – in the depiction of the kingdom of the Middle Niger as a state dominated from the beginning by the Songhay. For the sixteenth century, it overestimates the influence of Islam on Songhay and neglects the African dimension of the state.

In dealing with "Songhay origins and early history", Hunwick follows *Ta'riḫ al-Sūdān* and thus endorses most of the conclusions of Maurice Delafosse and Jean Rouch.⁵ He assumes that a minor Songhay chiefdom at Kukiya existed at the border of the present Mali and

* Also rev. art. for: Hunwick, John O.: *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire. Al-Sa'dī's Ta'riḫ al-Sūdān down to 1613 and other Contemporary Documents*, Leiden: Brill 1999. 412 p. 8° = Islamic History and Civilization, ed. by U. Haarmann and Wadad Kadi, 27. Cloth, € 120,00.

¹ J. Hunwick, "Gao and the Almoravids revisited: Ethnicity, political change and the limits of interpretation," *Journal of African History*, 35 (1994), 251–273; D. Lange, "From Mande to Songhay: Towards a political and ethnic history of medieval Gao", *Journal of African History*, 35 (1994), 275–301.

² This view is shared by S. Trimmingham, *A History of Islam in West African* (London, 1962), 83–84, J. D. Fage, *A History of Africa* (London, 1978) 76–77, and N. Levtzion, "The Sahara and the Sudan from the Arab conquest of the Maghrib to the rise of the Almoravids," in: J. D. Fage (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1978), 677–678.

³ D. Lange, "La chute de la dynastie des Sissé: Considérations sur la dislocation de l'empire du Ghana à partir de l'histoire de Gao", *History in Africa*, 23 (1996), 155–178, and *id.*, "The Almoravid expansion and the downfall of Ghana," *Der Islam*, 73 (1996), 313–351.

⁴ Hunwick, *Timbuktu*, XXII–LXV.

⁵ 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sa'dī, *Ta'riḫ al-Sūdān* [T/S], ed. and transl. by O. Houdas (Paris, 1898–1900); M. Delafosse, *Haut-Sénégal-Niger*, vol. I (Paris, 1912), 239–241; J. Rouch, *Contribution à l'histoire du Songhay* (Paris, 1953), 165–172.

Niger Republics prior to the beginning of the Islamic trans-Saharan trade. He further suggests that North Africans founded a small trading community at Gao close to the Niger river on the right bank of the Tilemsi valley in the early ninth century. Next, the petty rulers of Kukiya, the Zā, are supposed to have moved to Gao and to have established themselves on the left bank of the Tilemsi valley in order to take advantage of this opportunity by imposing customs and taxes on the foreign traders. Thus, in the course of the tenth century, the earlier local chiefdom had become a "small kingdom".⁶ The reconstruction proposed is affected by serious methodological shortcomings insofar as it neglects the contemporary external sources (to the stelae of Gao-Sané I will turn later on) and considers only one of the late internal chronicles. According to al-Ya'qūbī whose *K. al-Ta'riḫ* dates from 873 A.D., Gao was a major kingdom of the *bilād al-Sūdān*. The author known for his general accuracy clearly states: "the kingdom of Kawkaw (Gao) was the greatest of the realms of the Sūdān, the most important and the most populated . . . all the kingdoms obey its king".⁷ A century later, al-Muhallabī confirms this piece of information asserting that the kingdom of Gao (Kawkaw) was more populous than the kingdom of the Zaghāwa (Kānim).⁸ These elements from the external sources do not fit the proposed development of a former Songhay chiefdom in Kukiya into a "small kingdom" of Gao by the tenth century without any earlier powerful state in Gao. For Delafosse and Rouch, it was difficult to have access to the texts of the Arabic geographers pertaining to medieval West Africa. But these handicaps were overcome some time ago with the composition of two source books containing the translations of all the relevant passages of medieval Arabic texts dealing with West Africa.⁹ If not for neglect, there is no reason to give more credit to the chronologically unprecise oral tradition of the seventeenth century *Ta'riḫ al-Sūdān* than to the clear evidence of the contemporary external sources. This conclusion is all the more imperative as the other chronicle from Timbuktu, *T. al-Fattāsh*, not yet known to Delafosse at the time of his writing, presents precisely Gao as the first settlement of the Zā and hence as the starting point of the kingdom of Gao.¹⁰

Another point of our controversy concerned a question of local history: Did the earliest rulers of Gao settle on the right or on the left bank of the Niger? I am pleased to note that Hunwick corrected his earlier opin-

ion on this issue by adapting my view that there was no important right bank settlement.¹¹ However, for the sake of a satisfying continuation of our discussion one might have expected him to explicitly refer to his changing sides.¹²

Hunwick is more reluctant to drop his idea of a short-lived dynasty of Ṣanhāja established at Gao-Sané and ruling independently from the Zā who were supposedly based in the centre of Gao. He now lets his reader know that there is "an argument for the integration of the Ṣanhāja of Sané with the Zuwā dynasty of Gao".¹³ It is not difficult to guess that the argument of an identity of the rulers of Gao-Sané with the Zā/Zuwā is mine.¹⁴ I am looking forward to know the reasons for his rejection of the proposed identity.

The rise of Islam in connection with dynastic history is another important issue Hunwick takes into consideration. With respect to the early introduction of Islam into the Gao kingdom he uncritically combines external and internal sources without realizing that they concern different periods and also different dynasties of Gao history (although I pointed that out earlier). He notes that both al-Muhallabī (before 985 A.D.) and al-Bakrī (1068 A.D.) describe the ruler of Gao as a Muslim. Turning to *T. al-Sūdān* he takes the date of 400/1009–10 given for the conversion of the fifteenth Zā ruler, Kosoi, at face value by stretching it even further into the past in order to make it fit to the evidence of al-Muhallabī, assuming that the rulers of Gao must by that time have been the Zā.¹⁵ However, the validity of the date was already contradicted by the information given by the *T. al-Fattāsh* (NH) which dates the Islamization of Gao (meaning the Zā) to 1078/9–1082/3.¹⁶

The possibility of a tenth century conversion of the Zās is fully outruled by the evidence provided by the stelae of Gao-Sané according to which the third successor of Zā Kosoi was the third ruler of Gao-Sané who

¹¹ Hunwick, *Timbuktu*, XXXIV. Apparently, the suggestion of an early settlement of the Zā on the right bank of the Niger – based on al-Bakrī and on al-Muhallabī – was first made by Trimmingham, *History*, 87, and it was adopted by Levtzion, "Sahara and Sudan", 678. J. Hunwick developed the idea further and made it a major theme of early Songhay history in: *Sharī'a in Songhay: The Replies of al-Maghilī to the Questions of Askia al-Ḥājj Muḥammad* (Oxford, 1985), 3–10.

¹² See my critical assessment of this position in: "Les rois de Gao-Sané et les Almoravides," *Journal of African History*, 32 (1991), 256–259, his defense of it in: "Gao revisited," 265–268, and my renewed criticism of it in: "From Mande," 282–284. Ironically, it is at this stage that the archaeological findings of T. Insoll with respect to Koima "la dune rose", cast some doubt on the earlier assumptions concerning the right bank settlement ("Iron Age Gao: An archaeological contribution," *Journal of African History* 38 [1997], 4–8), although conclusive evidence for a "Right Bank Gao" has not yet been found (*id.*: *Islam, Archaeology and History: Gao Region (Mali) ca. 900–1250* [Oxford, 1996], 32–33).

¹³ Hunwick, *Timbuktu*, XXXVI.

¹⁴ Lange, "From Mande", 276–281; *id.*, "Chute", 162–165.

¹⁵ Hunwick, *Timbuktu*, XXXV.

¹⁶ T/F (NH), 332–333.

⁶ Hunwick, *Timbuktu*, XXV, XXXIII–XXXIV.

⁷ N. Levtzion and J. Hopkins (transl.), *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (Cambridge, 1981), 21.

⁸ Levtzion/Hopkins, *Corpus*, 174.

⁹ J. Cuoq, *Recueil des sources arabes concernant l'Afrique occidentale du VIII^e au XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1975) and Levtzion/Hopkins, *Corpus* (1981). In fact, Hunwick quotes the two relevant texts even though for other purposes (*Timbuktu*, XXV n. 48, n. 49).

¹⁰ *Notice historique* [NH] of Ibn al-Mukhtār/Maḥmūd Ka'ṭī, *Ta'riḫ al-Fattāsh* [T/F], transl. by O. Houdas and M. Delafosse, Paris 1913, 329–333.

died in 1120 AD.¹⁷ The successor of Zā Kosoi – or most likely he himself – having died in 1100 AD, it is impossible that the Muslim king of Gao who came to the note of al-Muhallabī in the tenth century belonged to the Zā dynasty. Indeed, al-Bakrī specifically states that the king of Gao was called Qandā,¹⁸ a name which does not occur in the list of Zā kings. We do not know anything precise about the ethnic background of this early line of Gao-kings. Most likely they spoke a form of Songhay, but that does not identify them any more as Songhay as the present Zarma. Lacking better evidence we may use the name Qandā in order to designate the first dynasty of Gao entering into the light of history.¹⁹ To assume that the Qandā correspond to the Zā would be wrong, since the latter can be shown to have strong connections to the Mande of Ancient Ghana. Instead of three we have therefore a succession of four dynasties in Gao: the Qandā, the Zā, the Sonni and the Askiya.

Next, there is the question of the impact of the Almoravid movement on Gao history. On the basis of the tie-in connecting the Zā and the earliest rulers of Gao-Sané, it is clear that the latter did belong to a black African dynasty and not to the Ṣanhāja.²⁰ Hence there is no need to suppose that a short-lived dynasty of Ṣanhāja ruled in Gao-Sané north of the Tilemsi valley while the Zā held sway very close to them in Gao, south of the Tilemsi valley.²¹ If this was the case, we would have to consider that one dynasty dominated the other and, since Hunwick believes the rulers of Gao-Sané to have been Ṣanhāja, this would certainly amount to a strong grip of the Almoravids on the Gao kingdom. In fact, a quite different picture results from the critical review of the sources. Undoubtedly the Ṣanhāja nomads made their influence to be felt on Gao in one way or another, but most likely they were not established in the town and, in contrast to the events in Ghana, their intervention did not lead to the dislocation of the state.²² Although their military strength must have contributed to the demise of the Qandā kings and to the consolidation of the reign of the Zā, by facilitating the production of a number of stelae in the Andalusian town of Almería,²³ they also made sure that the new Zā rulers were recognized as the legitimate kings by the people of the Gao kingdom.

With respect to ethnic groups, Hunwick assumes a basic situation of stability for the period after the tenth

century. He firmly links the concept of ethnicity to the linguistic situation and thus disregards the changes introduced by dynastic and political developments.²⁴ As a result of this restrictive approach to the complex issue of ethnicity, particularly relevant for Africa, he overlooks a number of important aspects of the successive events in this region: The Mande background of the Zā, the dispersal of the Zarma, the relatively late Sorko migration from the southeast and the rise of the Songhay warriors. All these ethnic disruptions are closely linked to the dynastic history of the Gao kingdom and to the interrelated history of Ghana and Mali.²⁵

The period of Malian suzerainty over the Middle Niger which extended from the second half of the thirteenth to the beginning of the fifteenth century is highly significant with respect to ethnicity.²⁶ Hunwick conceives the Malian pre-eminence of this period in terms of European nation state history: Mali conquered the Middle Niger, i.e. the Songhay, it established its hegemony over the region, foreign officials kept an eye on the local population, the conquerors first advanced and later withdrew.²⁷ Such a reconstruction suggests that, during the hey-days of the Mali empire, there must have been a clear distinction between the people of Mali, the Malinke, in the west and the people of the Middle Niger, the Songhay, in the east. But the available details of the dynastic history of the Middle Niger rule out the existence of a clear-cut opposition between the conquerors and the conquered – if at all a conquest had taken place. It would rather appear that the Keita were able to extend their authority far to the east because of the bonds of ethnic parentage between them and the Mande-derived Zā on which they could build. We do not know, why the Zā looked for protection from Mali, but one of the reasons may have been the disruptions created by the Sorko migration.²⁸ The Songhay emerged in all likelihood on the Middle Niger only in consequence of the movement of resistance against Malian domination instigated by the Sonni.²⁹

Hunwick devotes more attention to the Songhay state in the sixteenth century. For this period, he relies largely on the *Ta'rikhs* and by doing so he also adopts their Islamic outlook which, to say the least, is partisan. For

¹⁷ Lange, "Rois de Gao-Sané," 251–275.

¹⁸ Levtzion/Hopkins, *Corpus*, 87.

¹⁹ Lange, "From Mande," 282–284.

²⁰ While, earlier, I saw in them local Berbers ("From Mande," 275), I later came to the conclusion that they were Mande or, more precisely, members of the Sisse dynasty of Ghana ("Chute," 158, 171–173).

²¹ Hunwick, *Timbuktu*, XXXV–XXXVI.

²² On Ghana see N. Levtzion, *Ancient Ghana and Mali* (London, 1973), 43–46, and Lange, "Almoravid expansion," 326–342.

²³ S. Sauvaget, "Notes préliminaires sur les épitaphes royales de Gao," *Revue des Études Islamiques* (1948), 5, and *id.*, "Épitaphes royales de Gao", *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, B, 12 (1950), 421.

²⁴ Hunwick, *Timbuktu*, XXIV–XXXII.

²⁵ For more details see D. Lange, "From Ghana and Mali to Songhay: the Mande factor in Gao history", in: *id.*, *Ancient West African Kingdoms* (in press).

²⁶ For the dating of Mali's rule over Gao, see Ch. Monteil, "Les empires du Mali," *Bulletin du Comité d'études historiques et scientifiques de l'AOF*, 12 (1929), 365, 433, and Levtzion, *Ancient Ghana*, 75, 84.

²⁷ Hunwick, *Timbuktu*, XXXVI–XXXVIII.

²⁸ The dating of the Sorko migration is uncertain. While Delafosse (*Haut-Sénégal*, I, 238–244) and Rouch (*Contribution*, 165–174) proposed a pre-dynastic date, I first suggested a post-Malian date ("From Mande," 295–299). I now would prefer to adopt a middle position by making the Sorko migration precede the rise of the Songhay warriors.

²⁹ Further details in: Lange "From Ghana" (in press).

illustration we may first turn to his subchapter on "al-Sa'dī and his history". A few notes at the beginning provide some useful information on the career of al-Sa'dī. When considering the author's general tendency, Hunwick mentions that his judgements reflect the ideas of the scholarly class of Timbuktu. Thus, al-Sa'dī is said to blame Sonni 'Alī (for his paganism) and to praise Askiya Muḥammad (for his Islam) according to the values of his group. This is surely correct, but it does not indicate how to overcome the regional and religious oneness of the author. As a matter of fact, both al-Sa'dī and Ibn al-Mukhtār, the author of *T. al-Fattāsh*, were men of Timbuktu and of the western provinces – we do not even know whether they ever visited Gao and or any other central or eastern province of the former Songhay empire. They lived at a time when the descendants of the Moroccan conquerors of Songhay, the Arma, were the actual rulers of the country. Furthermore, they wrote their chronicles in 1655 and 1665 and neither of them witnessed the Songhay empire, which had been destroyed in 1591, three years before the birth of al-Sa'dī.³⁰ Instead, they were familiar with the deeply Islamized western provinces of the former empire and they certainly often visited the court of the puppet line of Askiyas set up by order of the Moroccan Pasha Maḥmūd b. Zārqūn in Timbuktu after the conquest of Gao. This experience shaped their perception of pre-Moroccan Songhay. Furthermore, it is clear that the authors of the *Ta'riḫs* turned to historical writing in order to preserve a positive memory of the past and its lessons for future generations – the author of the appendix of *T. al-Fattāsh* explicitly states that he wrote his account on the invitation of Askiya Dāwūd b. Hārūn (1657–1669).³¹ Hence, if both chronicles paint the picture of a fully Islamized Songhay society this does not necessarily correspond to actual facts. There are, indeed, some indications that this view of Songhay is fallacious.

Concerning the "pagan" and bloodthirsty practices of Sonni 'Alī (1465–1492) so vigorously condemned by the Muslim scholars,³² Hunwick does not significantly change the perspective of the chroniclers when he describes the great conqueror as a harsh ruler of ruthless disposition.³³ The people had become tired of constant warfare, but this does not make him a brutal despot. Had Sonni 'Alī really been so cruel and unislamic, certainly Leo Africanus would not have referred to him on the basis of later accounts as *un gran principe* "a great

lord".³⁴ A more balanced evaluation of his religious policy should take into account the widespread West African institution of divine kingship. To be sure, Sonni 'Alī must have used the festivals and ceremonies of the Sudanic tradition in order to be able to integrate the Mande and Songhay people of the Middle Niger into a single state.

When Askiya Muḥammad seized power in 1493, no reform seems to have altered the character of these institutions. Moreover, there are indications that after initial attempts to strengthen with the help of the Mande elements the Islamic overlay of the state, he returned to an exclusive reliance on the less islamized Songhay. Indeed, the elimination of the *Zā-bēr-banda* ("posterity of the great Zā") in the battle of Borgu in 1505 can be interpreted as a fundamental change in ethnic policy consisting in the restoration of the earlier Sonni regime.³⁵ Although the author of *T. al-Fattāsh* (NH) explicitly rejects the identification of the *Zā-bēr-banda* with the Sonni, Hunwick now suggests that they were "surviving members of the Sonni 'Alī's clan".³⁶ He thus blurs the important issue of the integration of the Songhay under the leadership first of the Sonnis and then of the Askiyas into the expanding state of Gao.

With respect to the pre-Islamic rituals surviving in imperial Songhay, it should be noted that rather accidentally Ibn al-Mukhtār mentions an object called *din tūr* which was prominent among the royal insignia. Although we know neither its shape nor its exact function, we learn from the information provided by the chronicler that only the possessor of the *din tūr* could claim to be the legitimate ruler of Songhay.³⁷ On account of this function it may be compared to the *munē* of Kanem (destroyed as early as the thirteenth century) and to the *dirki* of Kano supposed to have been equivalent to the Coran (demolished at the end of the eighteenth century).³⁸ Hunwick calls attention to the *din tūr* but for him it is merely a ceremonial element of an earlier period of Songhay history.³⁹ Taking into account the survival of a rich pre-Islamic religious culture among the Songhay until the present day,⁴⁰ one may suppose that the real situation in the Songhay empire would not have differed much from the present situation in the Hausa kingdom of Gobir and the Yoruba kingdom of Ọyọ,

³⁰ N. Levtzion has shown that Maḥmūd Ka'ī, who died in 1593, was not the real author of *T. al-Fattāsh*. He left substantial notes for the first five chapters and various other notes used by his grandson Ibn al-Mukhtār in 1664 for the composition of the chronicle (N. Levtzion, "A seventeenth-century chronicle by Ibn al-Mukhtār," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 24 [1971], 571–593).

³¹ TS 2/tr. 3; Hunwick, *Timbuktu*, 2; T/F (NH), 327.

³² TS 64–71/tr. 103–116; TF 42–53/tr. 80–102; al-Maghīlī, *As'ilat Askiyā*, in: Hunwick, *Sharī'a*, 12–17; tr. 69–72.

³³ Hunwick, *Timbuktu*, XXXVIII–XXXIX.

³⁴ G. B. Ramusio, *Della descrizione dell'Africa*, vol. I (Venice, 1550), 77v; transl. A. Épaulard, *Description de l'Afrique*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1956), 463. Hunwick omits this important passage (*Timbuktu*, 276).

³⁵ TS 76/tr. 125; T/F (NH), 333–334; Lange, "Rois de Gao-Sané", 272; *id.*, "From Mande," 287, 299–300.

³⁶ *Timbuktu*, XXXVII n. 56.

³⁷ The reference is here to the *Hi-Koy* requesting from the fleeing Askiya Ishāq (1588–1592) to hand over to him the royal regalia (T/F, 153/tr. 274).

³⁸ D. Lange, *Le dīwān des sultans du Kānem-Bornū* (Wiesbaden, 1977), 71–72; H. R. Palmer, *Sudanese Memoirs*, vol. 3 (Lagos, 1928), 127.

³⁹ Hunwick, *Timbuktu*, XLVIII.

⁴⁰ J. Rouch, *Religion et magie songhay* (Paris 1960), *passim*.

both ruled by Muslims of long standing.⁴¹ Islam was certainly the official but not the only religion of sixteenth century Songhay.

Looking at Hunwick's description of sixteenth century Songhay from a wider perspective, we find hardly any attempts to go beyond the onesidedness of *Ta'rikhs*. Adopting the viewpoint of the chroniclers, his bias in favour of Islam is particularly striking in his subchapter called "the religious estate". Any reader familiar with Jean Rouch's *Religion et magie songhay* (Paris, 1960) would expect to find some indication of what the overall religious situation in sixteenth century Songhay really was like, not just how the chroniclers present it to us. Knowing something about other parts of Africa, the reader might have anticipated the description of a religious estate partly beyond the reach of the king consisting of various cult groups headed by priests.⁴² On the basis of the Songhay chronicles it is of course impossible to provide such a description. It would also be difficult – yet not impossible – to attempt such a reconstruction on the basis of the remarkable account given by Jean Rouch of contemporary day practices of the *holey* and other pre-Islamic cults. Therefore, it is misleading to speak of "the" religious estate, of "the" religion or of "the" faith as if Islam was not only the dominant but also the sole religion in sixteenth century Songhay.⁴³

With respect to the Islamic religion as such, the reader of *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire* is on more solid grounds. This is the aspect of Songhay history Hunwick knows best. Being aware of the biases of the *Ta'rikhs*, the reader will forgive him when he describes the situation in Timbuktu and the western provinces neglecting Gao and the east. After all, the book has also "Timbuktu" in its title. Knowing the tendency of the West African Muslim writers to privilege scholarship and theology over religious practices, he will content himself with an outline of the intellectual history of the Muslim scholarly community, including remarks on the institutions of teaching, the fields of the Islamic sciences studied and the writings of individual authors.⁴⁴ How-

ever, one would have appreciated finding some references, even if hypothetical, to the real situation at the centre of the kingdom with respect to the ongoing confrontation between Islam and the African cultural heritage. In his earlier writings, Hunwick casted light upon some interesting details which point into this direction.⁴⁵ Further careful reading of the *Ta'rikhs* and prudent attempts to use anthropological survivals will certainly provide more.

Ägyptologie

Castel, Georges, Laure Pantalacci, Nadine Cherpion: *Le mastaba de Khentika. Tombeau d'un gouverneur de l'Oasis à la fin de l'Ancien Empire*. Le Caire: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale 2001. 4° = Balat, 5; Fouilles de l'IFAO, 40. Brosch. ISBN 2-7247-0292. Vol. 1. Texte. VI, 331 S. m. Abb.; Vol. 2. Planches. 202 S. Taf., 1 Faltkt. im Anhang. – Bespr. von Nicole Kloth, Heidelberg.

Seit 1977 erforscht das Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale (IFAO) die Siedlung Ain Asil und die dazugehörige Nekropole des späten Alten Reiches von Qila el-Dabba in der Oase Dachla nahe dem heutigen Dorf Balat. Es setzt damit die Arbeit von Ahmed Fakhry fort, der dort 1970 eine Gruppe von zunächst vier Lehmziegelmastabas entdeckt hatte,¹ in denen – wie sich später herausstellte – die Oasengouverneure des späten Alten Reiches bestattet worden waren. Der vorliegende fünfte Band der Reihe „Balat“ trägt die Ergebnisse der Untersuchungen des IFAO an der Mastaba des Chentika (Nr. III) aus der Zeit Pepis II. zusammen. Die Publikation ist übersichtlich nach vier Aspekten unterteilt: die Geschichte der Mastaba (Bauphasen), ihre Dekoration, ihre Konstruktion und einem nach Material geordneten Katalog der Funde. Ein zusätzlicher 200 Seiten starker Tafelband mit Kartenmaterial, Plänen, Faksimilezeichnungen und (teils farbigen) Fotografien in hoher Qualität ist dem Textband beiseite gestellt.

Für die Errichtung der Mastaba können die Autoren drei Phasen nachweisen, in deren Verlauf die ursprüngliche Anlage des Grabes mit Eingangsvestibül, einem über eine Treppe zugänglichen Hof, Kultkammer und Nebenraum um zusätzliche Räume innerhalb des Hofes erweitert wurde (Kap. II). Im unterirdischen Bereich befinden sich vier Schächte mit dazugehörigen Grabkammern aus Ziegeln, von denen nur diejenige des Chentika einen zusätzlichen, mit Kalkstein verkleideten Vorraum besitzt (Kap. III). In dieser wurde das Skelett

⁴¹ See G. Nicolas, *Dynamique sociale et appréhension du monde au sein d'une société hausa* (Paris, 1975), 53–135, 219–577, and W. Kühme, *Das Königtum von Gobir: Götter, Priester, Feste einer sakralen Gesellschaft* (Hamburg, 2003), 41–112, 133–212, and P. Morton-Williams, "The Yoruba kingdom of Oyo," in: D. Forde and P. M. Kaberry (eds.), *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1967), 36–89.

⁴² This might have been the situation in Gao at the time of al-Bakrī when the inhabitants of the town "worshipped idols" in spite of the king's adoption of Islam (*Corpus*, 87). Similarly in Ifé the king continues to support the traditional "religious estate" consisting in various cult groups although many Christians object to this policy (pers. observ., Febr. 2000).

⁴³ In spite of the promising subtitle "the bias of the [Timbuktu] sources" of one of the chapters, the same tendency prevails in J. Hunwick, "Secular power and religious authority in Muslim society: The case of Songhay," *Journal of African History*, 37 (1996), 175–194.

⁴⁴ Hunwick, *Timbuktu*, LVI–LXIII.

⁴⁵ The instances concern Askiya Dāwūd (1549–1582); see J. O. Hunwick, "Religion and state in the Songhay empire," in: I. M. Lewis (ed.), *Islam in Tropical Africa* (London, 1966), 124–143. For a wider perspective see also M. Tymowski, "Légitimation du pouvoir de la dynastie Songhay du XVI^e siècle," *Hémisphères*, 7 (1995), 189–198.

¹ S. *Denkmäler der Oase Dachla aus dem Nachlass von Ahmed Fakhry*, bearb. von J. Osing et al., AV 28, 1982.

eines ca. 25–30 Jahre alten Mannes gefunden, das wahrscheinlich Chentika selbst zuzuordnen ist. Ob es sich dagegen bei dem in der nördlichen Grabkammer gefundenen männlichen Skelett eines ca. 17–18 Jährigen tatsächlich, wie die Autoren vermuten (S. 271–272), um Chentikas Sohn Descheru handelt, der eventuell auch das Grab seines Vaters vollendete, kann letztlich nicht hinreichend geklärt werden. Da beide Männer relativ früh verstarben, könnte dieser Umstand jedoch als ein Grund für die relativ hohe Zahl von sieben belegten Oasengouverneuren in der Zeit von Pepi I. und Pepi II. herangezogen werden. Leider werden in der „Étude anthropologique“ der Publikation (Annexe 1, S. 277) lediglich Geschlecht und Alter der insgesamt vier gefundenen Skelette subsumiert. Eine Beschreibung und Analyse der Skelettfunde wären an dieser Stelle wünschenswert gewesen; auch Fotografien fehlen hier.

Beachtenswert ist die gemalte Dekoration der Mastaba, die sich nicht wie üblich in der oberirdischen Kultkammer befindet, sondern in der mit Kalkstein ausgekleideten Grabkammer des Chentika. Da der Grabherr, wie bereits erwähnt, bei seinem Tod nicht älter als 30 Jahre gewesen sein dürfte, scheint die Erklärung der Autoren, dass der oberirdische Teil der Mastaba beim Tod des Chentika nicht fertiggestellt war, einen plausiblen Grund für den ungewöhnlichen Anbringungsort der Malereien darzustellen (S. 120). In verschiedenen Punkten weichen die Themen der Dekoration vom üblichen Repertoire des Alten Reiches ab (wie etwa bei der Darstellung des in einem Schiff vor einem Opfertisch sitzenden Grabherrn) und nehmen somit in Teilen bereits den unkonventionellen Stil der Ersten Zwischenzeit voraus (Kap. V).

Aufgrund der für die Oase typischen Bauweise aus luftgetrockneten Lehmziegeln waren die Ausgräber gezwungen, die oberirdischen Mauern vollständig abzutragen. Hieraus ergab sich die Möglichkeit, die Bautechnik der Mastaba aufs genaueste zu untersuchen und aufgrund von Bauart und Anzahl der verwendeten Ziegel Schlüsse auf die Arbeitsorganisation in der Oase zu ziehen. Die Autoren kommen unter Annahme von zehn Arbeitern auf eine Bauzeit von 790 Tagen für die Mastaba. Da jedoch, wie die Autoren selbst einschränken, nicht gesagt werden kann, an wievielen Tagen im Jahr an der Grabanlage gearbeitet wurde und auch nicht ausgeschlossen werden kann, dass zu verschiedenen Zeiten unterschiedlich viele Arbeiter in den Bau involviert waren, lässt sich bei einer Neun-Tage-Woche nur ungefähr auf eine Mindestbauzeit von ca. 2,5 Jahren schließen (S. 115–117).

Ein eigenes Kapitel gilt den beschrifteten Objekten aus der Mastaba des Chentika, die in erster Linie aus Baugraffiti und Siegeln bestehen (Kap. VI). Leider ist auf keinem der zahlreichen Graffiti ein Datum verzeichnet. Auch die bereits von Fakhry in der Mastaba geborgenen Stücke, von denen eine Scheintür-Steile mit zwei antithetischen Opfertischszenen, beschriftet mit einem Anruf an die Lebenden und folgenden idealbiographischen Phrasen den wichtigsten Fund darstellt (Fig. 100), werden kurz resümiert. Die Steile befand sich ursprünglich

an der Westwand der Kultkammer. Geht man davon aus, dass Chentika unerwartet verstarb, so dass (wie oben erwähnt) die gemalte Grabdekoration in die Grabkammer verlegt werden musste, so wurde diese Steile im oberirdischen Bereich der Mastaba nach Ansicht der Rez. eventuell später vom Sohn gestiftet, der auf der Steile als „Oasengouverneur Descheru“ seinem Vater Weihrauch spendet.

Im Katalogteil der Publikation werden die Funde, nach Materialart getrennt, aufgelistet (Kap. VII). Zu den bemerkenswertesten Funden aus dem Grab des Chentika gehört ein Straußenei, dessen Fragmente fast zu einem vollständigen Ei rekonstruiert und zu dem ebenfalls der Standfuß sowie die Mündung plus Deckel aus Stein gefunden werden konnten (Annexe 2).² Es ist mit der Ritzzeichnung eines Raubvogels mit ausgebreiteten Schwingen dekoriert, dessen Klauen je in einem *Schen-Ring* enden. Da das Gefäß in der Bestattungskammer einer Frau (caveau 5100) gefunden wurde, scheint auf den ersten Blick der wie ein Geier (Nechbet) anmutende Vogel gut ins Bild zu passen, doch kann Cherpion aufgrund verschiedener Merkmale wie etwa der Kürze des Halses die Darstellung als Falken identifizieren (S. 279), wobei sie die Herkunft des Stückes eher in einer lokalen als einer königlichen Werkstatt vermutet (S. 280). Der interessante Fund ist für Cherpion außerdem Anlass zu einer näheren Beschäftigung mit der Bedeutung des Straußeneis – eine eingehendere Arbeit zu diesem Thema fehlte bisher.³ Die von ihr postulierte Ausweitung des bekannten Symbolgehalts des Straußeneis für Regeneration und Leben bis in die prähistorische Zeit wird untermauert durch eine Liste aller bis dato bekannten 26 Straußeneisfunde, von denen nur die wenigsten in die dynastische Zeit zu datieren sind (drei stammen ebenfalls aus Balat und wahrscheinlich auch aus dem Grab einer Frau, Nr. 25a–c).

Insgesamt sind alle Baubefunde und Einzelfunde in Bezug auf ihre Lage, Fundzusammenhang, Beschaffenheit und Maße mit Hilfe von Plänen und Tabellen hervorragend dokumentiert. Über einen nach Inventar- und Katalognummern geordneten Index lässt sich außerdem die Referenz zum Text herstellen und von dort der Verweis auf die Abbildungsnummern im Tafelteil. Leider fehlt der Publikation sowohl ein Wortindex wie ein sachliches Register, welche dem Leser die gezielte Suche nach Einzelaspekten erleichtert hätten.

Trotzdem haben die Autoren eine erschöpfende und über die reine Grabdokumentation hinausgehende Publikation vorgelegt, die einen wertvollen Beitrag zum besseren Verständnis der Architektur und Geschichte Dachlas am Ende des Alten Reichs leistet.

² Fundnummer P61–64, jetzt Kairo JE 98774.

³ Siehe demnächst auch Sebastian Bock, *Ova struthionis*. Die Straußeneisobjekte in den Schatz-, Silber- und Kunstkammern Europas, Kap. II: Vorgeschichtliche Zeit, Antike und afrikanische Naturvölker (im Druck).