

To Article XIX (1996b: "Almoravid expansion")

Written in conjunction with the previous study, this essay reverses the perspective by dealing mainly with Ghanean and incidentally with Gao history. It builds on an earlier attempt to throw light on the geographically and historically overlapping histories of Ghana and ancient Mali (1992b). On the basis of written, oral and archaeological evidence it argues that the centre of the Ghana kingdom was not in Kumbi Saleh but at Tendirma in the Lakes region of the Niger. The essay further suggests that Islam was not implanted in the Ghana state as a consequence of a Lamtūna conquest but as a result of a palace revolt in 1076 facilitated by Almoravid pressure. Hence, the fall of the pre-Islamic Sisse rulers is thought to have been brought about by a *coup d'état* staged by the Muslim party of the Sisse under Kema-Magha. It supposes that in 1087, following the death of the Almoravid leader Abū Bakr b. 'Umar, Kema-Magha was in turn overthrown and that he withdrew with his royal household to the provincial town of Gao.

A major correction of this article concerns the role of the Lamtūna in the fall of Kema-Magha. There are some difficult assumptions involved in the postulated Lamtūna conquest of Ghana in 1087 (1996b: 338-342). If the Almoravids conquered Ghana after the death of 'Abū Bakr b. 'Umar – and supposedly established themselves there as a ruling elite – where then did the 'Alid kings of Ghana come from who were paying allegiance to the 'Abbasids at the beginning of the twelfth century?⁴¹ Why does an external source associate the date 1076 with an Almoravid conquest and not the date corresponding to the death of Abū Bakr b. 'Umar, 1087?⁴² How is it conceivable that Kema-Magha got support from other Almoravids in Gao after his supposed expulsion from Ghana by the Lamtūna? Therefore it seems preferable to interpret the oral indications of a Berber presence in Ghana restrictively in terms of some king with temporary influence in Ghana and not in terms of the establishment of a Berber dynasty. It is more likely that Muslim mulattoes from inside Ghana, and Almoravid preachers from outside, conjointly criticised the surviving institutions of divine kingship. Under un-

known political circumstances the Sisse were expelled from the capital of Ghana and sought refuge in their eastern province of Gao towards 1087.

Evidence for the survival of a key institution of divine kingship among the Zāghē of Gao-Saney can be found in the stelae of the queens. De Moraes Farias is probably right to interpret the presence of a number of queens in the Zuwā polity in reference to official queen-mothers in other Sudanic kingdoms.⁴³ The correspondences noted between the stelae of two kings and two queens could indeed indicate a special relationship between two officials, though not of a matrimonial but of a ceremonial nature (cf. 1991a: 260-261). In the mid-fourteenth century the “official queen” of Mali was vested with considerable power.⁴⁴ A good example of a queen-mother’s office resisting Islamizing tendencies for several centuries before finally succumbing to Islamic reforms, is provided by the office of the Magira in Bornu (1990: 151-153). Within the Hausa states the *Sarauniya* (“queen”), usually called Magajiya, was formerly a high priestess and as such she played an important role in the Gani festival.⁴⁵ After their conquest of the Hausa states, the Fulani Jihadists abolished this former priestly office because of its pre-Islamic religious nature.⁴⁶ These parallels throw light on the *malika* institution of Gao. Just as the formerly divine Zāghē kings prided themselves of their pre-Islamic Zāghay ancestry, they were eager to up-hold the rich institutional and festival tradition of Ghana, their country of origin. Therefore the *raison d’être* of the *malika* stelae of Gao-Saney should be seen as an attempt to Islamize as much as possible an earlier key institution of divine kingship through Arabic epitaphs and related Islamic funeral rituals.