

as well as a powerful fleet of ships for use on the Niger, he embarked on his remarkable career of conquest, from the third year of his reign. He first turned his attention north-west and using the invitation of the people of Timbuctu as an excuse, he marched on that town and captured it without any difficulty. He then turned westwards and attacked Jenne which was then a very prosperous commercial town as well as a great Muslim educational centre. For some time, Jenne was able to keep off the Songhai army because of the network of waterways which acted as a natural defence. However, after a siege said by tradition to have lasted seven years, seven months and seven days, Jenne was captured by Sunni Ali in 1473.

From there, he turned eastwards and conquered all the regions south of Timbuctu as far as the northern borders of Yatenga, the powerful Mossi kingdom. His efforts to reduce the Mossi to subjection failed, and so he pushed on across the Niger and conquered the Hausa state of Kebbi.

Sunni Ali was ruthless to anybody who tried to defy his authority. Thus he is said to have murdered most of the clerics and scholars of Timbuctu who refused to submit to him, while those of Jenne, who readily submitted, he treated with marked generosity. He was said to have been particularly hostile to the Fulani. One chronicle relates that 'he hated no enemy more bitterly than the Fulbe (i.e. the Fulani), he could not see one, whether learned or ignorant, man or woman, without wanting to kill him. He admitted no Fulbe into the administration or judiciary. He so decimated the Sangare tribe (a Fulani tribe) that the remnant which survived could have been gathered under the shade of one tree.' This was most probably due to the fact that not only were the Fulani conducting raids but they would not acknowledge the jurisdiction of the empire into which they were steadily infiltrating.

Besides extending the frontiers of his kingdom, Sunni Ali also realized the need for an effective system of government and attempted

to provide one. He divided his conquests into provinces. Over some of these provinces he appointed new governors, but in districts where the rulers readily submitted, he left them in control provided they paid an annual tribute. He also appointed a Commander-in-chief or rather Chief Naval Officer, called the *hi-koy*, for his fleet. For the administration of the turbulent Hombori region, that is the region to the south of Timbuctu and north of the Mossi kingdom, he created a special governor called the *Tondifari*, a Songhai title meaning a governor of the mountains. Sunni Ali was still organizing his conquests into an effective empire when on his way home from one of his wars of conquests in 1492 he was drowned in rather mysterious circumstances.

Thus within a period of twenty-eight years, Sunni Ali converted the little kingdom of Gao into the huge empire of Songhai stretching from Kebbi in the east to Jenne in the west, and from Timbuctu in the north to Hombori in the south. In spite of his achievements, however, the Sudanese chroniclers were not particularly complimentary in their tributes to Sunni Ali. One of them called him 'an impious monarch and horrible tyrant'; a second described him as 'a great oppressor and destroyer of towns, with a hard and unjust heart', and a third exclaimed 'A sanguinary despot who slaughtered so many thousands of people that God alone knows their number; he was cruel to the pious and wise, he humiliated them and put them to death'. These comments, however, need not be taken too seriously. It is known that Sunni Ali was so busy about the affairs of this world that he paid little attention to Islam. Indeed it was believed that he was a pagan. Therefore to these fanatical Muslim chroniclers who saw the promotion of Islam as the greatest duty of any ruler, Sunni Ali was bound to appear impious and degenerate. An important reason for his unpopularity with these chroniclers was his persecution of the clerics and pious men of Timbuctu. But surely, as a builder of a new nation, he could

not countenance any insubordination from anybody, pious or otherwise. The very fact that he treated the Muslim scholars and clerics of Jenne with generosity proves that he was not simply anti-clerical or anti-Muslim.

In spite of the testimony of the chroniclers, Sunni Ali was easily the greatest of the rulers who ever mounted the throne of Gao. He laid the solid foundation on which his immediate successor, Mohammed Askia, built. At least one chronicler was pro Sunni Ali. 'He surpassed all the kings, his predecessors, in numbers and valour of his soldiery,' he wrote, 'his conquests were many and his renown extended from the rising to the setting of the sun. If it is the will of God, he will be long spoken of.' Sunni Ali was certainly long spoken of by the Sudanese scholars but, alas, in no complimentary terms. I hope that modern African scholars will be more generous to him for he was a clever politician, a brave soldier and an able administrator.

6 MOHAMMED ASKIA THE GREAT OF SONGHAI

As we saw in the last chapter, Sunni Ali died before he could complete the consolidation of his conquests and the establishment of an effective system of government for his empire. Furthermore his wars had greatly interrupted commerce and Islam had also declined because of the treatment he meted out to some of the devout Muslims and scholars. His successor, Mohammed Askia, then had to complete his administrative work, pacify Timbuctu and exploit its strategic situation, strengthen and purify Islam then at its nadir, and revive trade and commerce dislocated by Ali's wars. Above all, he had to consolidate himself on the throne and win the allegiance of the Songhai. These then were the problems that faced his successor, Mohammed Askia I, and they were made even more complicated by the way in which he succeeded to the throne. Mohammed Askia was in fact Mohammed Ture

Ibn Abi Bakr who was Sunni Ali's trusted Soninke general and Prime Minister. He was therefore not a member of the royal family but managed to seize the throne by organizing a coup d'état which resulted in the deposition of his master's son and successor, Abu Bakr Dao. Fortunately not only had he the personal qualifications but his reign was also long enough, from 1493 to 1528, to enable him to tackle all these problems.

As one would expect, the first problem he tackled was that of strengthening his position on the throne and ensuring that his children would rule in Songhai. He solved this in two ways. First of all, he either killed or expelled from the Empire all the surviving members of the two previous Gao dynasties, the Za dynasty that had founded Gao and had ruled till 1275, and the Sonni dynasty that had reigned from 1276 to 1493. Mohammed Askia was so successful in this that the dynasty which he founded and which became known as the Askia dynasty continued to rule in Songhai until the fall of the empire.

Next he tried to win the support and allegiance of his people. This he did by using Islam which, he realized, could be a strong unifying force. Hence, immediately after his accession to the throne, he started courting the friendship of the mallams and devout Muslims whom he and his master Sunni Ali had persecuted. He showered gifts on them and appointed many of them as his advisers and courtiers. Furthermore, as if to remove any doubts about his changed attitude to Islam and the Muslims, he went on the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1497 as soon as he felt that his position at home was secure. This pilgrimage was not improbably deliberately organized on a scale that surpassed that of Musa Mansa. For instance he was said to have been accompanied by 1,000 infantry, and 500 horsemen carrying 300,500 mithkals of gold. He spent this huge amount on alms, presents and on a hostel which he bought in Cairo for the use of Sudanese pilgrims. Before his return to the

Sudan, he cleverly persuaded the Sharif, Al-Abbas, to invest him with the important title of Caliph of the Blacks (*Khalifatu biladi l-Takrur*) which, he knew, could greatly enhance his prestige and position throughout Muslim Africa. This appeal to the devout Muslims proved very successful and throughout his reign the chroniclers and historians of the day hailed him as a great ruler, a devout Muslim and the legitimate ruler of Songhai. For instance one of them described him as 'a brilliant light shining after a great darkness; a saviour who drew the servants of God from idolatry and the country from ruin. The defender of the faithful who scattered joy, gifts and alms around him.'

After Mohammed Askia had secured himself on the throne, won the support of the Muslims and the coveted title *al hajj*, the title which to this day is given to any Muslim who has been on the pilgrimage to Mecca, he tackled the next problem, that of consolidating and extending Sunni Ali's conquests. With a well-trained and fully equipped army, he began his conquests by marching south and attacking the Mossi. Though, like his predecessor, he failed to defeat the Mossi, he was nevertheless able to strengthen the hold of Songhai on the southern regions. From the south, he turned westwards and attacked and conquered what remained of the kingdom of Mali after a war lasting thirteen years. From the west, he marched eastwards and reconquered Agadez and reduced the Hausa states of Kano, Katsina and Zamfara to tributary states of the Songhai Empire. In the north, he also consolidated Ali's conquests and extended Songhai's political sway into the Sahara as far north as the salt-mining centre of Taghaza. Thus, by the end of his reign, the Songhai Empire extended from Takrur in the west to Kano in the east and from Taghaza in the north to the border of the Mossi kingdom in the south.

Mohammed Askia was also an excellent administrator. He first abolished the existing political divisions and redivided his entire empire

into four vice-royalties or regions, each under a Regional Commissioner or Viceroy. He then subdivided the regions into provinces each under a governor. He also stationed judges in all the main towns throughout the empire. At the centre, he established a council of Ministers to assist him. These included a commander-in-chief (*balama*), a chief tax-collector or as we might call him today the Minister of Finance (*fari-mundya*), chief of Navy (*hi-koy*), a Minister in charge of foreigners (*korey-farma*), a Minister in charge of property (*warrey-farma*), and the Minister in charge of rivers, lakes and fisheries (*hari-farma*). All these central and provincial posts were filled with people who were either from his own family or had married into it and he could depose of any of them at any time. This was also true of the military chiefs. He left the Hausa states under their rulers but we have the evidence of Leo Africanus who visited Songhai in 1510 as a member of a mission under the leadership of his uncle sent by the Shereef of Fez, Malai Muhammed el-Kaim, that Askia compelled the king of Kano to marry one of his daughters while he stationed officials permanently in all these kingdoms to see that the tributes were regularly paid.

To meet the cost of an administrative machinery of this magnitude and complexity as well as a standing army, Mohammed Askia had reliable sources of income. The most important of these sources were the royal estates established throughout the Empire and worked by slaves. Each had to produce a fixed quantity of a particular commodity per year. For instance, his estate called Abda in the province of Dendi, which had 200 slaves under four *fanfa* or estate-managers, had to produce 1,000 sunhas of rice per year; some had to produce corn and others bales of dried fish. He also had certain groups of slaves who were craftsmen and had to produce a fixed number of say boats, spears, or arrows per year. For example, the Dyam Tene and Dyam Wali tribes had to supply the king with 100 spears and

100 arrows per family per year. All these provisions and equipment were used to maintain the army and the surplus was sold. The second main source of income was tribute from vassal states and regular contributions from the generals who obtained their revenue from taxes on peasants, farmers, and above all from customs duties.

To ensure maximum income from tolls and customs duties, Mohammed Askia and his civil servants did everything to promote trade and commerce. He made the routes safe by rigidly controlling the troublesome Tuareg. Furthermore he unified the system of weights and measures throughout the empire, and appointed inspectors for all the important markets who checked any falsifications. His creation of a professional standing army instead of relying on a feudal array also made it possible for the civilians to participate fully in commercial activities. The result of these measures was that trade boomed. The commercial activities of Songhai were centred on its three main cities. These were Jenne, the centre for the internal commerce, Timbuctu which controlled commercial relations with the west and north-west, and Gao which served the regions to the east and north-east like Kano, Tripoli and Egypt. These towns also became important centres of industry. There were as many as 26 *Tindi* or tailors' shops in Timbuctu alone, each of which had between 50 and 100 apprentices. Leo Africanus has left us eyewitness accounts of both Timbuctu and Gao which should be quoted. Of Timbuctu, he wrote, 'here are many shops of artificers and merchants and especially of such as weave linen and cotton cloth. And thither do the Barbary Merchants bring cloth of Europe. The inhabitants and especially the strangers there residing are exceedingly rich, in so much that the king is now married both his daughters unto two rich merchants.' He also described Gao as a town full of exceedingly rich merchants and hither continually resort great store of Negroes which buy cloth brought out of Barbary and Europe.

It is wonder to see what plenty merchandise is daily brought thither, and how costly and sumptuous all things be.' The main exports of Songhai remained the traditional ones of gold, ivory and slaves, while her leading imports were salt from Taghaza and horses from North Africa. The medium of exchange was the usual cowries, though Leo Africanus noticed that gold coins without any stamp or superscription were in circulation in Timbuctu.

Mohammed Askia, like Mansa Musa of Mali, cared for the material as well as the spiritual welfare of his subjects. Whether the Askia was on his accession a truly devout Muslim, or whether he merely used Islam to prop up his position, he certainly appears to have become a genuine Muslim, not improbably because of his pilgrimage to Mecca and the great scholars such as Abdul Rahman as-Suyuti and Mohammed al Maghilli whom he met and befriended. Hence, from the time of his return from the *hajj* till his death, he did everything in his power to see that Islam was purified and education and learning were promoted. For the purification of Islam, he attacked illiteracy among the mallams, saw to it that the ritual prayers and other duties such as fasting and almsgiving were observed, and insisted that women should go about veiled, making his own family set the example, according to one of the chroniclers. He also ensured that his officials imposed no illegal taxes, and that judges gave judgement according to the laws of the Holy Koran and the *Sharia*. All the chroniclers agree that Islam was greatly strengthened and purified during the reign of Mohammed Askia. To quote one of them, 'he eliminated all the innovations, forbidden practices and blood-shedding characteristic of the Shi (i.e. Sunni Ali) and established Islam upon sure foundations'.

Equally memorable and successful was his encouragement of higher education. Scholars and professors, attracted by the peace and order of the Empire as well as the generosity of Mohammed Askia, flocked into Timbuctu

which became, during his reign, not only a commercial but also a great educational metropolis. There were as many as 150 Kuranic schools in that city alone and university education was provided in the mosque of Sankore. The University, consisting, rather, like contemporary Paris and Oxford, of eminent divines and their pupils, attracted many students from far and wide and produced a great number of distinguished jurists, historians and theologians. Among them are the two great historians Mahmoud Kati and Abderahman As-Sadi whose history books, the *Tarikh al-Fattash* and *Tarikh as-Sudan* are still in existence and on which we have been relying for the reconstruction of the history of Songhai. Mahmoud Kati himself had this to say of the intellectual life of his town Timbuctu, 'In those days Timbuctu did not have its equal . . . from the province of Mali to the extreme limits of the region of the Maghrib for the solidity of its institutions, its political liberties, the purity of its morals, the security of persons, its consideration and compassion towards foreigners, its courtesy towards students and men of learning and the financial assistance which it provided for the latter; the scholars of this period were the most respected among the believers for their generosity, force of character and their discretion'. Leo Africanus's eyewitness account of the intellectual life of the city corroborates Mahmoud Kati's. 'Here are great stores of doctors, judges, priests and other learned men that are bountifully maintained at the king's cost and charges,' Leo wrote, 'and hither are brought divers manuscripts or written books out of Barbary, which are sold for more money than any other merchandise.'

This then was the picture of Songhai at the peak of its power in the third decade of the sixteenth century. Peace, order and security reigned, commerce boomed, Islam was purified and intellectual activities and learning, centering on Sankore University, flourished. But alas, by the end of that very century, only

about sixty years after the death of Mohammed Askia the Great, this great Empire had faded out of the stage of history. What brought about the fall of Songhai forms the subject of the next chapter.

7 THE FALL OF THE EMPIRE OF SONGHAI

Various reasons have been given for the fall of the vast empire of Songhai whose rise and development we have already discussed. One writer, Mahmoud Kati, attributed the fall of the Empire to the disastrous war between Askia Mohammed Bani who reigned from 1586 to 1588 and his brother Sadiq and to the immoral, irreligious and pagan activities of the successors of Askia the Great, reaching their climax in the reign of Ishak II. To Mahmoud Kati and also some modern historians, then, Songhai collapsed mainly because of internal weakness. This does not appear to be quite true. When the Empire of Songhai did fall, it was essentially due to external rather than to internal factors, that is, to the Moroccan invasion at the end of the sixteenth century, and not to her internal decline.

There is absolutely no doubt that most of the successors of Askia the Great did not have any of his courage, piety, devotion to duty and competence. In 1528, Mohammed Askia had been on the throne for thirty-five years. He was now a grand old man of eighty-five, and for the last ten years he had become increasingly blind and infirm. His children took advantage of this to rise up against him and to depose him. But his son Musa, who succeeded him, was assassinated for his cruelty in 1533, and Askia the Great's nephew, Askia Bankouri, was enthroned. He was no less cruel than Musa and it was he who exiled Askia Mohammed from Gao to the little island of Kankaka on the Niger. He was deposed in 1537 with the help of the viceroy of Dandi. One of Askia the Great's sons, Askia Ismail was then proclaimed King. His reasons for accepting the crown are rather interesting: 'to rescue my father from

his distressful condition, to enable my sisters to resume the veil that Bankouri had obliged them to relinquish, and to pacify Yan Mara, one of the hundred hen ostriches who was wont to throw herself into a frenzy whenever she saw Bankouri.' He proved as good as his words. We do not know whether the ostrich became happy again, but we know that he promptly brought his father Askia the Great from exile to Gao where he died in peace in 1538, and he must also have restored the veil to his sisters. Unfortunately, this able and very promising ruler died only two years after mounting the throne.

It is clear then that the first decade after Askia's deposition was marked by fratricidal struggles. However, these do not appear to have had any serious adverse effects on the peace, prosperity and stability of the Empire. It seems that Askia's administrative machinery was able to absorb all these shocks. It certainly did work with great smoothness during the reign of the next two successors which stretched from 1538 till 1584. The sheer length of these two reigns in itself provides clear evidence of the stability of the government of the Empire. The second of these rulers, Askia Daud, was a particularly able and pious ruler. He succeeded in suppressing all the turbulent peoples, especially the Tuareg in the north, and established further posts in the Sahara to ensure the security of the routes. He tightened Songhai's grip on Mali, Bagu and the Hausa States. Furthermore as a pious Muslim, he embellished Timbuctu, and according to the *Tarikh al-Fattash*, he was the first 'to form treasury storehouses, including libraries, and to have employed scribes to copy manuscripts which he sometimes presented to the Ulama's'. He is also said to have learnt the Koran by heart, and then gone on to read the whole of the *Risala* (the commentaries on the Traditions concerned mainly with jurisprudence).

By 1581 the Songhai Empire had been restored to the position it enjoyed at the time of the deposition of Askia the Great. Peace, order

and prosperity were once more established, religion was thriving, and the government was again stable and efficient. The Moroccan invasion occurred only ten years later, during which time succession disputes broke out again and three rulers came to the throne. Though these disputes must have caused some weakness at the court and might well have provided a pretext for Moroccan intervention, and even if the last three Askias were immoral and irreligious, there could not have been any serious damage done to the prosperity and stability of the Songhai Empire as a whole. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, the Songhai Empire could not have been in decline nor tottering to its fall. It was still quite stable and was enjoying considerable prestige and prosperity. If then Songhai fell only ten years after Askia Daud, it fell a victim not so much to its own internal weakness as in the case of Ghana and Mali, but rather to the cupidity of Al-Mansur, the Sultan of Morocco, and, to borrow Trimmingham's phrase, 'the barbarian soldiery of the Moroccan army'.

Al-Mansur came to the throne of Morocco in 1578 immediately after the celebrated victory of Morocco over Portugal on the field of Al-Kasr Al-Kebir. Having stabilized his position on the throne and spent all the money which he had obtained from the ransoming of prisoners on the famous palace Al-Bedi which he built in Marrakech, he began to look further afield for more money as well as adventure. The Sudan, from which thousands of camels were bringing in hundreds of pounds worth of gold, ivory and slaves, was the obvious choice. As he told his courtiers, 'I have resolved to attack Sudan. It is an exceedingly rich country and will furnish us with large taxes, and we shall thus be enabled to give greater importance to the Mohammedan armies.' Since the Songhai Empire was then controlling not only the entire western Sahara, with its rich salt mines of Taghaza, but also the gold-producing regions of Wangara and Bambuk, it was the obvious target.

After an unsuccessful attempt in 1584, in which an army of about 20,000 strong is said to have perished in the desert because of inadequate preparations, a more carefully organized military expedition was launched in 1590. The second Moroccan army consisted of 4,000 men carefully selected for their discipline, hardness and courage; only 1,500 were Moroccans; the rest were all hardened Andalusian or renegade European mercenary fighters and their commander was Judar Pasha, a young Spanish eunuch in the employment of the Sultan.

The army left Morocco in October 1590, successfully crossed the desert at some cost, and hit on the Niger River at Bamba, half-way between Timbuctu and Gao, in February 1591. The then Emperor of Songhai, Askia Ishak II, raised an army composed, according to As-Sadi, of 18,000 cavalry and 9,700 infantry, and courageously marched to meet the invaders. At the battle of Tondibi, thirty-five miles from Gao, in April 1591, the huge army of Ishak was completely defeated and routed. The Moroccans pressed on and seized Gao without a blow and then marched northwestwards and occupied Timbuctu, which they thoroughly sacked in 1593.

Many historians have concluded from the ease with which the Songhai army was defeated that the Empire was in a state of decline and they have, therefore, attributed its fall mainly to internal weakness. But this conclusion is not accurate. The evidence we have shows that the Songhai army was defeated and the Empire readily captured primarily because of the technological superiority that the Moroccans enjoyed over the Songhai. The Moroccan army was a well-trained and well-disciplined army full of hardened professional, renegade and mercenary fighters from Spain, Portugal and Turkey. Secondly, and this is even more important, of the 4,000 soldiers, 2,000 were armed with arquebus (an early type of portable gun supported on a three-legged stand), 500 were mounted gunmen and there

were in addition 70 European musketeers. Their baggage included 31,000 pounds of gunpowder and a similar weight of lead—carried by 800 camels. The Songhai army was armed simply with bows and arrows, spears, swords and clubs. Assuming that even half the number of the Moroccans perished en route, and according to Mahmoud Kati, the Moroccan army was only 1,000 strong at the battle of Tondibi, armed as it was with guns and muskets, it could easily rout any force armed as the Songhai army was. Indeed, so shocked and terrified were the Songhai by the noise which they had never heard before and the smoke they had never seen before that they simply fled in all directions and later gave the name Ruma (meaning shooter) to the Moroccan soldiers, a name by which the descendants of the soldiers in the region of Timbuctu are known to this day.

This superiority in arms which the Moroccan forces enjoyed over the Songhai seems to me to be the main explanation for their easy victory. Indeed Al-Mansur himself realized this, and urged it on his sceptical courtiers and advisers. When his advisers pointed out that it was impossible to conquer the Sudan and reminded him that none of his predecessors had ever embarked on such a dangerous project, this was his reply: 'You forget the defenceless and ill-equipped merchants who, mounted or on foot, regularly cross desert wastes which caravans have never ceased to traverse. I, who am so much better equipped than they, can surely do the same with an army which inspires terror wherever it goes. . . . Moreover, our predecessors would have found great difficulty if they tried to do what I now propose, for their armies were composed only of horsemen armed with spears and of bowmen; gunpowder was unknown to them and so were fire-arms and their terrifying effect. Today, the Sudanese have only spears and swords, weapons which will be useless against modern arms. It will therefore be easy for us to wage a successful war against these people and prevail

over them.' Considering what happened at Tondibi, no one would doubt the prophetic nature of these words, which completely won the courtiers over.

But it should be pointed out that when it had recovered from the first shock and panic, the Songhai army bravely put up some resistance. It deposed the demoralized Ishak II and enthroned Askia Kagho, who bravely took the field and, using guerilla tactics, harassed the Moroccans. Indeed so troublesome did he become that the Moroccans resorted to treachery to get rid of him. They summoned him to what was described as a peace talk and then murdered him and his followers in cold blood. But this did not end the resistance of the Songhai. Askia Nuh succeeded his elder brother and continuing the guerilla tactics in the regions of Dendi and Borgu he kept the struggle going for another three years and is said to have inflicted a number of defeats on the Moroccans. Several reinforcements had indeed to be brought in from Morocco in 1593. However, in 1595 at a battle during which both Nuh and the Commander of the Moroccan forces were killed, the Songhai were decisively beaten. The death of Nuh marked the end of organized resistance and saw the conquest of the great Songhai Empire. By that date, that is, 1595, the Empire from Jenne to Gao had been brought under the domination of the Moroccans and the great Songhai Empire had become a province of the Empire of Al-Mansur, the Sultan of Morocco.

It is obvious then from the above that the Empire of Songhai did not, like her two predecessors Ghana and Mali, decline and then fall. She was literally shot down by the musketeers and gunmen of Morocco at the very peak of her power and in full bloom of her glory and splendour. She was a victim not of her own internal weakness but of the greed of Al-Mansur, the Sultan of Morocco.

The effects of the Moroccan conquest were disastrous not only for the Songhai Empire but also for the entire region of southern Sa-

hara and the Niger Bend. In the first place, the Moroccans failed to establish any system of government in place of the one they had so ruthlessly destroyed. Thus with no effective central government to maintain peace and order, chaos and anarchy set in. The Tuareg of the Sahara, the Fulani and later the Bambara of Segou and the Arma, that is, the Moroccans who had settled permanently in the Sudan, fought against each other for the control of the region and these struggles continued till the nineteenth century. During these wars Timbuctu, Gao and Jenne suffered immensely. Gao declined into an obscure little village and Timbuctu lost most of its scholars. Secondly, as a result of this anarchy and insecurity, trade was greatly disturbed and the caravan trade across the Sahara became an annual affair; the gold and ivory which were sent northwards began to be diverted westwards and southwards to the coast to meet the demand greatly stimulated by the entry of the Dutch and the English into competition with the Portuguese at the very time of the Moroccan victory. Thus by the end of the seventeenth century, although trade from Timbuctu and its regions with the north had not stopped, it had been reduced to only a fraction of its former volume. Thirdly, as the Moroccans paid no attention to religion and learning, Islam declined in these regions and animism, stimulated by the Bambara of Segou, began to flourish. It was not until the first half of the nineteenth century that, as a result of the rise of the Masina Empire of the Fulani, the fortunes of the regions of the Niger Bend began to rise again. But before then, the Hausa States further to the east had begun to flourish and it is to the history of these states that we must now turn.

8 THE HAUSA STATES AND THE FULANI JIHAD

As a result of the rather barbaric and ruthless destruction of the great Songhai empire by the Moroccan army and their failure to establish

any effective system of government in its place already discussed, disorder and insecurity set in. Since neither trade nor learning can flourish in an atmosphere of wars and disorder, the merchants as well as scholars began to move eastwards to the relatively peaceful region which was bounded on the west by the Niger and on the east by Lake Chad. This region which is now occupied mainly by the modern state of Nigeria, was then the home of the seven true Hausa states or Hausa *bokwoi* (Daura, Kano, Katsina, Zaria, Rano, Gobir and Biram), the seven bastard Hausa states or *banza bokwoi*, namely Zamfara, Kebbi, Nupe, Gwari, Yauri, Yoruba and Kororofa, and the kingdoms of Bornu and Fumbina. It is the history of these principal Hausa states that I will try to deal with here.

The origins of these Hausa states are, like those of many African states, shrouded in myth and mystery. The Hausa have their own traditional accounts of their origins. The most popular and well known of them is the account known as the Daura legend. According to this Daura was the first of the Hausa states to be founded by one of the daughters, named Daura, of a grandson of a Canaanite named Najib who left Palestine with all his family and settled in Libya. During the reign of one of her successors, the son of the king of Baghdad arrived in Daura with his followers after having first lived in Bornu. He is said to have killed a huge serpent that was preventing the people of Daura from fetching water from their only well except on Fridays, and in appreciation of this service, the Queen agreed to marry him. They had a son called Bawu who succeeded his father. He also had six sons and each of them founded a town which later developed into a state, hence the seven Hausa *bokwoi*.

According to another account, collected in Hausaland in the middle of the nineteenth century by Henry Barth, the famous German scholar and explorer, Bawu was the son of a man named Karbagari who entered Hausaland from the east and captured Biram. Bawu is

then said to have married a Berber woman and had six children. These children were Daura, the eldest, Katsina and Zaria or Zegzeg who are represented as twins, Kano and Rano, another pair of twins, and Gobir. And each of these children went out and founded a state to which he gave his own name.

Although neither of these stories can be taken at its face value, it seems clear that the names represent an immigration of various tribes and clans into Hausaland about 1,000 years ago from the Sahara and the east. These groups seem to have settled in some of the then leading villages and towns occupied by the autochthones who were black peoples of the Dalla stock and belonged to the So cycle of civilization. The immigrants soon seized political power and established ruling dynasties. They then began to assimilate the autochthones and to develop their towns and villages into states. In their attempts to extend their power, some of the dynasties were obviously more successful than others, for while some like Rano and Daura, developed into no more than city states, others like Kano, Katsina and Zaria certainly grew into huge kingdoms. It has been suggested recently—and this seems very plausible—that some of the conquered groups withdrew westwards and southwards rather than accept vassalage or assimilation and re-established new kingdoms that developed into the *banza* states.

It is not certain when these city states and kingdoms began to emerge in Hausaland. One thing that is certain is that until the fourteenth century all of them were rather insignificant compared with Ghana and, later, Mali or Songhai in the west, or Kanem in the east. There was up to that century obviously no trade between the Hausa states and the Muslim countries of North Africa nor had Islam entered that region. This view is clearly borne out by the fact that none of the Arabic scholars whom we have been quoting and who wrote before the fourteenth century mentions any of the Hausa states. The first to men-

tion any of them, and even then in a rather casual way, was Ibn Battuta who visited Mali in 1352. He refers to Yufi, which has been identified as Nupe, and describes it as 'one of the largest towns of the Negroes, whose ruler is one of the most considerable of the Negro rulers'. And he also mentions 'Kubar (which has been identified as Gobir) in the regions of the heathens' to which, he says, copper from Takedda was exported. It is not until the beginning of the sixteenth century that we have the first detailed description of four of the seven Hausa *bokwoi* by Leo Africanus. It is clear from his descriptions that all four had developed into full-fledged kingdoms by the end of the fifteenth century, with Gobir and Kano as the most powerful. 'The inhabitants', he writes 'are rich merchants and most civil people.' He also describes the town of Gobir as follows: 'Here are also great stores of artificers and linen weavers; and here are such shoes made as the ancient Romans were wont to wear, the greatest part whereof be carried to Tombuto and Gago.' He noted further that the inhabitants of Zaria were rich and had great traffic with other nations.

The reasons for the growth of these Hausa states during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are not difficult to find. The first was the stimulus derived from the reintroduction of Islam from Mali. It has now been established from linguistic evidence that Islam was first introduced into Hausaland from Kanem probably in the twelfth or thirteenth century. But it does not appear to have taken any firm root until fresh bands of Muslim Wangara and Fulani traders and scholars began to enter Hausaland from Mali in the fourteenth century. According to the Kano Chronicle, the first of such bands came into Kano from Mali during the reign of Yaji (1349–85). It appears that Yaji's successor reverted to animism. However, his successor, Dauda, who was described as a learned man, and those who came after him remained Muslim, and they gave every encouragement to the spread of the religion.

More and more missionaries and scholars continued to come from Mali during the fifteenth century. For instance, during the reign of Yakubu from 1452 to 1463, the Chronicle notes that 'the Fulani came to Hausaland from Mali bringing books on Divinity and Etymology. Formerly,' it continues, 'they had in addition to the Koran only the Books of Law and the Traditions.'

The introduction and spread of Islam affected the growth of the Hausa states in a number of ways. In the first place it inspired the kings to embark on the conquest of pagan states. Secondly, it introduced a new legal system, a new system of taxation and above all a new statecraft which most of the Hausa rulers adopted. Thirdly, it introduced literacy and new administrative techniques. Finally, Islam put some of the rulers in touch with the great Muslim scholars and philosophers abroad from whom the Hausa kings could seek advice on political and social problems. The best known of such scholars was Mohammed Al-Maghili with whom Rimfa, the king of Kano from 1463 to 1499, corresponded and from whom he received a treatise on government entitled *The Obligation of Princes* which is still extant.

The second reason was economic. It is clear from the Kano chronicle that it was during the fifteenth century that the Hausa states began to develop commercial contacts not only with Mali, following the entry of the Wangara, the Sahara and North Africa, but also with Gonja and modern northern Ghana. 'At this time' (that is between 1421 and 1438) says the Chronicle, 'Zaria under Queen Amina, conquered all the towns as far as Kwararafa and Nupe. Every town paid tribute to her. The Sarkin Nupe sent forty eunuchs and 1,000 kolas to her. She first had eunuchs and kolas in Hausaland. In her time, the whole of the products of the west were brought to Hausaland.' This, we may note, is the first reference to the kola nut trade from modern Ghana to Hausaland. From the same source, we also learn

that salt was imported from Bilma through Agades into Gobir and Hausaland, and we read of the entry of Arabs and Tuareg in large numbers into Hausaland. The development of this caravan trade must have brought in wealth, an indispensable factor in the rise and expansion of states.

The third reason for the growth of the states was political. Both Zaria and Kano were fortunate in their kings and queens of the fifteenth century. Zaria, under her semi-legendary Queen Amina, who is said to have reigned for thirty-four years from the beginning of that century, extended its frontiers to as far south as Nupe and Kororofa. From the middle of that century, however, thanks to the ability of the two kings, Mohammed Rimfa who reigned from 1463 to 1499, and Abdullahi, from 1499 to 1509, Kano completely eclipsed all the other Hausa states.

Owing then first to the stimulus and unity provided by Islam, secondly, to the wealth generated by the developing caravan trade and thirdly, to the ability of their kings, most of the Hausa states had developed from mere city-states into strong kingdoms by the end of the fifteenth century. During the first three decades of the sixteenth century, however, these Hausa states, like the other states in the regions of the Niger and Senegal, were reduced to tributary states by Mohammed Askia of Songhai or by the kings of Bornu further to the east. Indeed, between about 1450 and 1550, Hausaland became a bone of contention between Bornu and Songhai. But after the death of Mohammed Askia, most of the Hausa states became internally self-governing, and after the Moroccan conquest they became fully independent. Not only did the collapse of Songhai ensure their complete independence but it greatly accelerated the pace of their growth. As has been pointed out already, the disorder and insecurity which resulted in the regions of the Niger diverted the caravan trade into Hausaland via the Tripoli-Ghadames-Ghat-Air route. The scholars and mallams followed

in the wake of the traders. The result of all this was that the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries saw the heyday of the Hausa states.

The first of the Hausa states to gain what the Niger region lost were Katsina and Gobir, because they were the most northwestern of the states. Both traders and scholars flocked into Katsina throughout the seventeenth and in particular the early eighteenth century. Katsina thus became the commercial as well as the educational centre of Hausaland. By the end of the eighteenth century, the capital of the same name, Katsina, was said to have a large population of 100,000 and its king was said to be the most wealthy and most powerful of the rulers of Negroland. In the words of the explorer Barth, 'Katsina during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of our era seems to have been the chief city of this part of Negroland, as well in commercial and political importance, as in other respects; for here that state of civilization which had been called forth by contact with the Arabs seems to have reached the highest degree, and as the Hausa language here attained the greatest richness of form and most refined pronunciation so also the manners of Katsina were distinguished by superior politeness from those of the other towns of Hausa.' Gobir, Kano, Kebbi and Zaria also shared in the great economic prosperity and cultural attainments.

However, during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, all the Hausa states were wiped off the political map of the central Sudan, and in their place was established a single Fulani Empire. This almost incredible political change was the outcome of a political revolution organized by the Fulani under the leadership and inspiration of Usuman dan Fodio. Who then were the Fulani, and what were the causes, nature and consequences of their revolt?

The Fulani, whom we have already encountered on a number of occasions, are a people now known to have originated in the lower

basins of the Senegal and the Gambia as a result of a mixture between Berber emigrants from the Sahara and the Negroes of the Wolof and Serer stock. It appears that part of them—probably the predominantly Berber portion—stuck to the nomadic mode of life of a section of their ancestors and became known as the *Bororoje* or Cattle Fulani, while part of them remained in the towns, became fanatically Muslim and generally well educated, and are known as the *Fulanin Gidda* or Town Fulani. The two groups began infiltrating eastwards and southwards, into the regions of Ghana, Mali and Songhai between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, into Hausaland in the fifteenth century and by the sixteenth century they had penetrated as far east as the Cameroons. In all these areas, they maintained their traditional way of life, the *Bororoje* sticking to the rural areas and the *Fulanin Gidda* to the towns. Because of their education, the latter were employed in Hausaland as civil servants, diplomats, and tutors at the courts of the Hausa kings, while some of them established schools of their own where they taught the usual Islamic sciences, namely, Theology, Law, Grammar, Rhetoric and Prosody. One of these *Fulanin Gidda* was Usuman den Fodio, and the immediate cause of the revolt was a clash between him and the kings of Gobir.

Usuman den Fodio was born in December 1754 in Gobir to a family of the Toronkawa clan which had migrated from Futa Toro in Senegal some fourteen generations before. He began his education at a very early age which took him to different mallams or teachers in different places including Agades in the oasis of Air in the Sahara desert. At the rather early age of twenty, he began his career as a teacher and preacher at Degel in Gobir. From there, he conducted a number of missionary tours to other parts of Hausaland, especially to Kebbi and Zamfara, advocating the practice of a more orthodox form of Islam and condemning all non-Muslim practices. His increasing fame reached the court of Gobir and in about 1781

he was employed by the King, Bawa, as tutor to the royal family. His continuous insistence on a puritanical form of Islam and his condemnation of illegal taxes and pagan practices implied a criticism of the kings of Gobir, while the steady increase of his following at Degel constituted a threat to their authority. Bawa's successors therefore began to take measures to counter this threat. The first of them, Nafata, for instance, ordered that nobody but den Fodio was to preach, that there were to be no more conversions to Islam and that those who were not born Muslim were to return to their former religions, and finally that men should not wear turbans nor women veils, customs which, according to one historian, 'gave to the Shehu's party the cohesion and sense of common identity which the Habe kings feared'.

Nafata died shortly after this (1802), but his successor, Yunfa, was even more determined to check the growing power of den Fodio. According to some sources, Yunfa invited den Fodio to his court and then attempted to murder him but failed. Yunfa then went on to attack a group of Usuman's followers led by Abdul Salame in December 1803, and when Usuman caused the captives to be released at Degel and repeatedly refused to hand them over, Yunfa threatened to attack Degel itself. This threat led to the flight (*hijra*) of den Fodio and his followers from Degel to Gudu on 21 February 1804, a date still honoured in Northern Nigeria. At Dugu, he raised the standard of revolt by attacking the near-by towns of Gobir, and then having been proclaimed *Amir al-muminin*, Commander of the Believers, he proclaimed a *jihad* or holy war against the rulers of the Hausa states. Various Fulani rose up in rebellion in the other states and came to ask for flags from Usuman. Within a decade all the Hausa *bokwai* had been conquered and in the next two decades Nupe, parts of the Oyo Empire (Ilorin) and Bornu (Katagum and Gombe) were added to the Fulani Empire with its new capital of Sokoto. Before his death in 1817, Usuman divided the Empire into two and gave the west-

ern half (Gwandu) to his brother Abdullahi and the eastern half (Sokoto) to his son Bello.

This revolt raises a number of questions which should be answered here. The first is why the Hausa states were so easily defeated. The first answer to this is that all the Hausa states were in a state of weakness by the beginning of the nineteenth century mainly because of the internecine wars among themselves and the attacks of the Kororofa which went on almost continuously during the second half of the eighteenth century. Gobir, which fought with Katsina in the 1750's, and with Zamfara and Kano in the 1760's, bore the brunt of these wars and consequently she became particularly weakened and it is not surprising that the revolt began in that state. Besides weakening the Hausa states, these wars also left behind them a legacy of jealousy and animosity which ruled out any co-operation among these states against a common enemy. When Yunfa appealed to the other kings at the outbreak of the revolt he received no response. Since each Hausa king was thus left to face the Fulani armies, which often received reinforcements from Sokoto or Gwandu, none of them had much chance. Thirdly, while the Hausa kings could not count on each other, they could not count on all their subjects either. Most of them had been alienated by the extortionate taxation and arbitrary nature of the rule of their kings, and therefore looked to Usuman who had been condemning these practices as a deliverer. The fourth and certainly one of the most important reasons was the fanaticism and determination with which Usuman was able to infuse his followers by his preaching, coupled with the ability of Abdullahi and Bello on the battlefield. It is interesting to note that the Fulani failed to conquer Bornu where they encountered a leader in the person of al-Kanami, who was able to provide the same sort of inspiration and leadership.

✓ The second question is what was the real nature and therefore the fundamental causes,

of this revolt? What can be stated now in the light of the rapidly accumulating evidence on the subject is that it was of a very complex nature having religious, political as well as social elements in it. The revolt, as we have seen, was touched off by a clash between Usuman den Fodio and the kings of Gobir, and there is absolutely no doubt that Usuman's main concern was the purification and expansion of Islam, the elimination of all unorthodox practices, and government by god-fearing kings in accordance with the precepts of Islam, all of which were lacking in Hausaland by the end of the eighteenth century. Islam was by then certainly in decline, administration of justice was corrupt, taxes were oppressive, many non-Muslim practices were rampant both at the courts and among the ordinary people, and many areas of Hausaland, such as those which later became known as Bauchi and Adamawa, were still pagan. Moreover, Usuman's generals, his brother Abdullahi, his son Bello, and most of the flag-bearers were all people who shared their leader's zeal for Islam and the enforcement of a Muslim form of government and were also well educated in the Islamic sciences. Indeed, some historians are beginning to call this revolution, rather like the revolution which swept through western Europe in 1848, the revolution of the intellectuals. From all these considerations, it is clear that the revolt had a strong religious element in it and can indeed be regarded as a *jihād* in so far as it aimed at the expansion of Islam and the establishment of Islamic government.

It would be wrong however to regard the revolt simply as a *jihād* or a purely religious movement for a number of reasons. The first is that the revolt was also to some extent an answer to the political as well as the racial question posed by the gradual infiltration of the Fulani, especially the *Fulanin Gidda*, throughout the western Sudan: namely, how long these people, usually highly educated, fanatically Muslim, economically well-to-do

and regarding themselves as racially superior, would continue to remain in politically subordinate positions? It is interesting to note that this question was answered not only in Hausaland but indeed throughout the western Sudan by, significantly enough, Fulani-led revolts beginning with the one in Futa Toro in the 1770's, followed by that of Usuman in 1804 in Hausaland, that of Ahmadu Lobbo in Massina in the 1810's, that of al-hajj Umar in the 1840's and that of Samori Toure in the 1870's. As a recent student of Usuman's movement has pointed out, some of the wealthy *Fulanin Gidda* in Hausaland had, by the last decade of the eighteenth century, not only become dissatisfied with the Hausa governmental system, but had also begun 'to manifest and succeed in political ambitions, if only in a limited sense'. The second and an even more significant one is the fact that the leadership of Usuman's revolt was concentrated solely in the hands of the Fulani. Indeed, of the fourteen flag-bearers, only one of them was not a Fulani. What is more, with the exception of two, all the others were in fact, as a recent authority has pointed out, 'primarily the delegates of the influential *Fulanin Gidda* interests', and that the only two who were chosen by Usuman himself were sent out, rather significantly enough, to areas where 'because of the lack of a sizeable Fulani Muslim community, Usuman could have no hope that leadership would arise spontaneously.' Thirdly, the hard core of Usuman's army consisted of the Bororoje, and though they had their own grievances particularly over the cattle-tax or *jangali*, that so many of them joined Usuman's side may have been due 'to their perception of a general threat to all Fulani'. Though it is true that many Fulani remained on the side of the Hausa kings while many Hausa and Tuareg also fought on Usuman's side, in view of the fact that leadership was concentrated in the hand of the Fulani, that Usuman himself and Bello looked to the *Fulanin Gidda* in the other states for leadership and that the Bororoje formed the

hard core of the army, the revolt can also be considered to some extent a Fulani national revolt.

Finally, as we have seen, without the support of the Hausa peasants, the *talakawa*, and the Fulani nomads, the revolt would not have succeeded so readily. But these thousands of people were attracted to Degel not simply because of Usuman's magnetic personality and his reformist zeal, but rather because they had their own grievances arising from exorbitant taxation, arbitrary imprisonment, injustice and the oppressive rule that they had been suffering at the hands of the Hausa kings, and which Usuman was condemning in such forthright terms. If it is wrong to consider this revolt simply as a peasant revolt, or the revolt of the down-trodden Hausa peasants and the over-taxed Fulani nomads against the Hausa aristocracy, it is true to say that the movement had a genuine popular basis, at least in the beginning, and could therefore be considered in this sense as a social movement.

Usuman den Fodio's revolt, then, had strong religious, nationalistic as well as social elements in it. Nor should we be surprised by this, since it was the interaction of all these elements that produced the revolt and ensured its success.

This very complex revolt, needless to say, had very far-reaching and lasting consequences. Politically, as we have seen, it led to the overthrow of all the old Hausa dynasties and the establishment of a single Fulani Empire stretching from the Niger to the Benue, divided into emirates under emirs who were nearly all Fulani. The modern region of Northern Nigeria is more or less co-terminous with the creation of Usuman and his flag-bearers. The Sultan of Sokoto, who was the religious as well as the political head of that region, was a direct descendant of Usuman den Fodio, and the emirs are also descendants of the flag-bearers—a clear evidence of the lasting nature of the work of Usuman and his colleagues in the political field.

The second consequence was economic. The establishment of a uniform system of government in place of the many competing ones meant a considerable elimination of the internecine wars that had characterized the history of the Hausa states in the eighteenth century. Peace and order therefore reigned in most parts of the Fulani Empire especially between the 1820's and 1850's and both greatly stimulated commercial and industrial activities, as is borne out by the accounts of the European explorers who visited Hausaland during that period. All these explorers—Clapperton, Denham and Barth—were particularly impressed by the commercial and industrial activities of Kano which had by the 1820's regained its former role as the commercial and industrial metropolis of Hausaland and the main entrepot for the trade with modern Ghana, Dahomey and Western and Eastern Nigeria. To quote Barth's description of Kano in the 1850's, 'The principal commerce of Kano consists in native produce, namely, the cotton cloth woven and dyed here or in the neighbouring towns . . . The great advantage of Kano is that commerce and manufactures go hand in hand, and almost every family has its share in them. There is really something grand in this kind of industry, which spreads to the north as far as Murzuk, Ghat and even Tripoli; to the west, not only to Timbuktu, but in some degree even as far as the shores of the Atlantic, the very inhabitants of Arguin dressing in the

cloth woven and dyed in Kano; to the east, all over Bornu . . . and to the south it maintains a rivalry with the native industry of the Igbara and Igbo, while towards the south-east it invades the whole of Adamawa. . . . The chief articles of native industry, besides cloth, which have a wide market, are principally sandals . . . tanned hides and red sheep skins, dyed with a juice extracted from the stalks of the holcus.' Other towns which benefited from the Fulani Pax were Zaria in the emirate of that name, Yola in Adamawa, and Kulfi and Egga in Nupe.

Thirdly, the revolution brought about a great revival and spread of Islam and gave a really great stimulus to education and learning in Hausaland. Areas like Bauchi and Adamawa became converted for the first time. Furthermore, at least the first generation of emirs led by Bello were sincere religious devotees and saw to the establishment of true Islamic judicial, political and social institutions. Above all, Usman, Abdullahi and Bello were all very great scholars and wrote a large number of books mainly as textbooks for the guidance of their civil servants, and their literary activities did touch off a veritable renaissance in Hausaland. If today Islam is a force to reckon with in Nigeria—and indeed in the Sudanese states of Senegal, Mali, Niger and even Guinea—it was because of the revolutionary Islamic movements of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in general, and that of Usman den Fodio in particular.