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Chapter 6

Sudanese Kingdoms of West Africa

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Introduction

The Sudan is derived from the Arabic word, *Bilad al-Sudan* (the land of the Black peoples), a term which early Arab geographers used to describe the West African savanna. This area occupies a unique position in the history of West Africa, in that it gave rise to some of the earliest states, kingdoms, and empires in the region. The most prominent of them were Ghana, Mali, Songhai, Kanem-Borno, and the Hausa states. Some of these kingdoms began to flourish from about the eighth century A.D. While to varying degrees the states in the central and eastern areas of the West African Sudan lasted till the nineteenth century or even the imposition of colonial rule in the early twentieth century, those in the west experienced a period of rise and fall. Ghana, the first of the Sudanese empires, thrived between the fifth century A.D. and the early thirteenth century. It was briefly overshadowed by the Susu state which was displaced by Mali Empire. Mali was in turn eclipsed by the Songhai Empire which lasted until 1591.

The West African Sudan was one of the earliest parts of sub-Saharan Africa to effect a transition from hunting and gathering to sedentary culture through the domestication of animals and the development of cultivation. One factor which contributed to this transition was the population pressure occasioned by the desiccation of the Sahara Desert. Up to about 5000 B.C., the area now occupied by the Sahara Desert was a fertile land traversed by a number of rivers, lakes, creeks, and streams. Because of its fertility, it supported a large population. But the Sahara started drying up, causing most of its inhabitants to move northward into the Maghrib and southward into the Sudan. The resultant population pressure, coupled with a number of other factors, necessitated increased sedentarization.

The vegetation of the savanna, particularly the grassland of the northern savanna (the sahel), made it very easy for the occupants, with their stone and later iron implements, to conquer, harness, and exploit the environment. In the Late Stone Age, sharp stone implements were used to clear the vegetation and till the soil. Of revolutionary significance was the development of iron technology in the

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Sedentary

5000 BC
Sahara
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migrating
into the
sahel

Stone
Age

first millenium B.C.¹ Iron had a revolutionary impact not only on agriculture, but also on warfare and defense. This revolution made it possible for many sedentary communities to arise in the Sudan.

With the increasing use of iron tools it was possible to generate an agricultural surplus. This, together with the use of iron weapons, gave rise to social stratification and the increasing need to expand, factors which helped to create the nuclei of states, kingdoms, and empires. There are some common themes that run through the history of the Sudanese states. They include their favorable geographical location, trade and the influence of both Islam, able and charismatic leadership, and fairly similar patterns of administration.

Geographical Location

In the period immediately following the desiccation of the Sahara, the Sudan, particularly the sahel, provided excellent conditions for the emergence of states. Other favorable conditions existed in the basins and valleys of the Rivers Niger and Senegal, and around Lake Chad, as well as the inland delta of the River Niger. The desiccation of the Sahara and the shrinking of Lake Chad, forced much of the population of the Sahara into the sahel. The population pressure created by this resulted in the need for intensive exploitation of the environment, which was accelerated with the introduction of iron technology. In addition, regular attacks from desert nomads created the need for more effective defense systems and, therefore, a further impetus to the development of states.

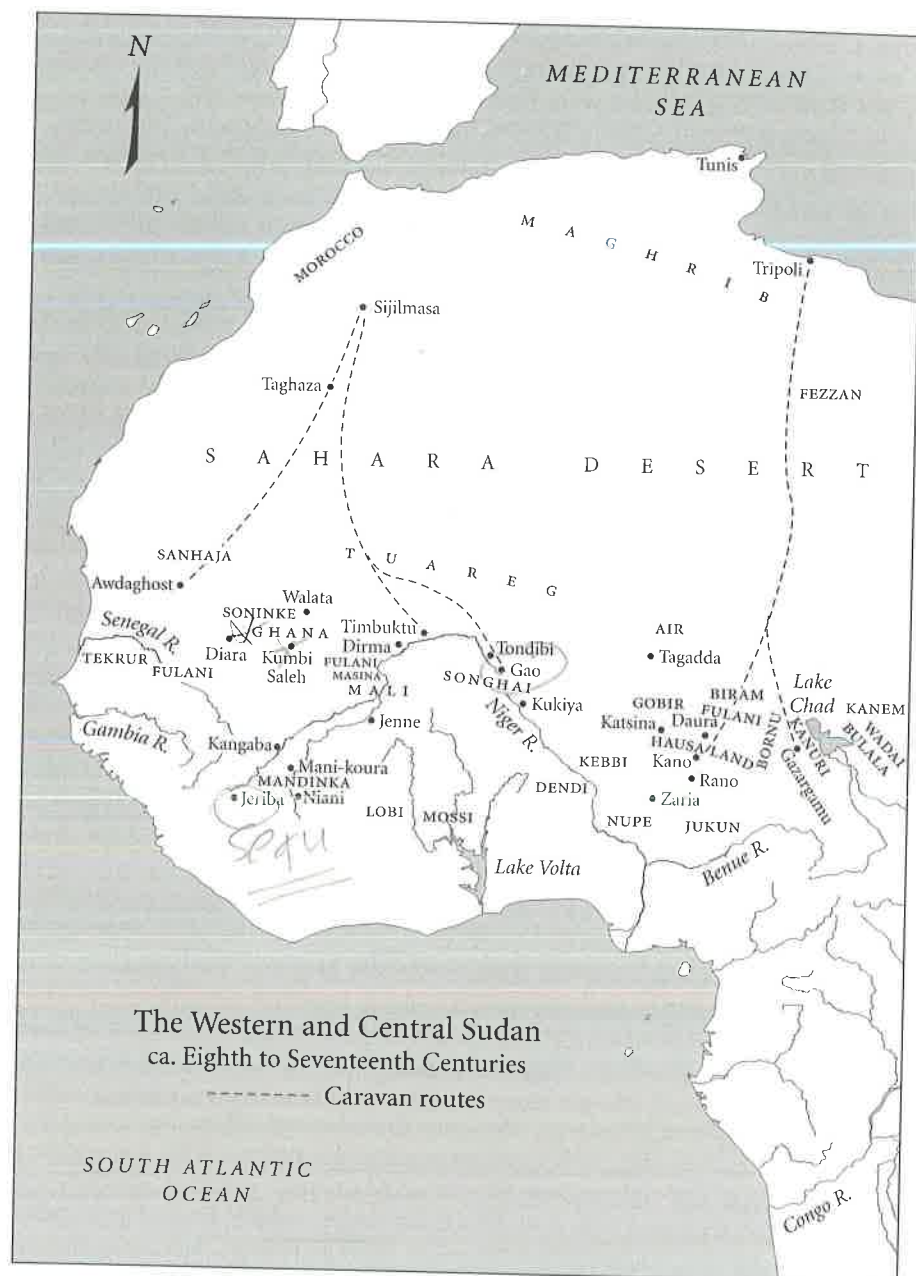
In the first millennium B.C. and the first millennium A.D., the sahel was reasonably fertile and could support the production of various grains. Fish were plentiful in riverine areas. Increased production of these items resulted in surplus accumulation and social stratification with the emergence of leadership and military classes. It is therefore not surprising that the nuclei of the earliest Sudanese states, Takrur, Ghana, Gao, and Kanem were located in the sahel.² I shall illustrate this fact with specific references to three of these states.

Situated in the sahel between the inland bend of the River Niger and the upper reaches of River Senegal, the Soninke of Ghana were favorably placed to evolve the nucleus of an empire. Given the type of vegetation in the sahel, it was relatively easy for the Soninkes to clear and cultivate their environment. Thus they cultivated agricultural products like millet, sorghum, and others. The demand for these products by Sahara dwellers helped to accelerate the exploitation of the Soninkes' environment as well as the desire to bring neighboring groups under their control. This gave them access to the agricultural products of these groups, as well as gold from the area of Bambuk. The use of iron weapons, and

1. There is a controversy surrounding the development of iron technology in West Africa. In line with the discredited Hamitic hypothesis, some scholars attribute the source of iron technology in the West African Sudan to either Egypt or Meroe, while others have postulated the independent invention of the technology. See for instance, Andah (1979), Amadi (1989), and Miller and van Der Merwe (1994).

2. Takrur was the only one among these city-states that did not expand into a large kingdom. The discussion will be on the three that expanded into large kingdoms.

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Gao,
the River



**Figure 6-1. The Western and Central Sudan,
ca. Eighth to Seventeenth Centuries**

later horses, gave them military superiority over their neighbors. Their expansion helped to bring more fertile areas in the inland delta of the Niger, along the Senegal, and between the Senegal and Gambia Rivers, under Soninke control.

Gao, the nucleus of Songhai, was in the sahel, located on the inland bend of the River Niger. It occupied an area which could support diversified agricultural

activities. This is clearly attested to by the fact that the people of the Songhai Empire were divided into three main professional groups, the Sorko who were fishermen, the Gow or Gabibi who were hunters, and the Do who were mixed farmers. Their products included fresh and dried fish, rice, corn, sorghum, and millet. The presence of craftsmen who produced farming tools, boats, and weapons greatly encouraged both the exploitation of their environment and the eventual incorporation of surrounding groups into the kingdom. Perhaps a unique advantage derived from location was the development of a powerful navy which played a major role in Songhai's expansion.

Lake Chad played a crucial role in the emergence of Kanem. The desiccation of the Sahara drew people from various directions towards the diminishing lake. The Chad area was home to diverse groups of hunters, farmers and pastoralists, as well as craftsmen. Apart from supporting the production of diverse items and hence the development of surplus accumulation and social differentiation, this convergence of various peoples and their attempts to adjust to the new environment created challenges and conflicts. These were resolved through the development of better tools and weapons and the foundation of Kanem by the Kanuri people who became the dominant group in the region.

The location of the Hausa states, which stretched from the sahel in the north to the southern savanna in the south, enabled them to produce a variety of crops. Much of Hausaland had rich and fertile soil. As a result the Hausa were able to support early sedentarization, and agriculture became the bedrock of their economy. The crops grown included millet, sorghum, various forms of grains, and rice. One important factor that supported the early settlement and development of states in this area was the presence of rich and fairly well-distributed deposits of iron ore. Since most of the deposits were in the southern savanna regions, close to wooded areas, it was relatively easy to get enough firewood and charcoal for smelting the ore. This resulted in the production of various domestic and farming implements, as well as weapons. In addition the strategic location of some areas in terms of defense attracted early settlement. The presence of all or most of these factors contributed to the early emergence of the nuclei of the Hausa states, such as Kano. Apart from the fact that the Kano area was very rich and fertile, Dalla Hill, the nucleus of the state, was useful in defense and contained rich iron ore deposits.

Of all the Sudanese kingdoms, Mali was the only one whose nucleus was completely located within the fertile southern savanna region. This favorable geographical location not only aided the rise of Mali, but turned it into one of the wealthiest Sudanese states with a highly diversified economic base. The location of Kangaba, the nucleus of the empire, together with its capital, Niane, in the southern savanna where rainfall was plentiful, as well as on the fertile plain of the Sankarani River (a tributary of the Niger), promoted agriculture and fishing. The primary occupations of the people were agriculture, hunting, and fishing. They produced regular surpluses of millet, sorghum, fonio, and rice. In addition, Kangaba was situated on the edge of the gold-producing regions of Bure and Bambuk. Hence, a major impetus for expansion was the control of these important goldfields. Indeed the early control of the gold-producing areas was important in the rise of Mali Empire.

Songhai Navy

Kanem

crafts

Hausa states

iron ore

Mali

Kangaba

Bure

3000 years

no

Trade

Trade played a crucial role in the history of the Sudanese kingdoms. A major factor that stimulated their expansion was the need to control areas of production, as well as trade routes. Trade promoted the intense exploitation of the resources of the Sudan and was a primary source of surplus accumulation, social stratification, centralization, and expansion of kingdoms. It also contributed to the introduction of new ideas such as Islam. In addition, the immense benefits associated with trade led to competition and warfare among the Sudanese kingdoms. This had the dual effects of causing the fall of some of the kingdoms and spurring the expansion of others. There were three forms of trade: local trade; regional trade among the Sudanese, with the forest region to the south, and the Sahara to the north; and perhaps most important, the trans-Saharan trade with North Africa.

Local and regional trade provided the initial material basis for the development of the Sudanese kingdoms. The sahel was one of the earliest areas to benefit from these forms of trade. It was one of the earliest parts of the Sudan to develop agriculture through the domestication of sorghum, millet, and various grains. Although the majority of the people of the Sudan were farmers, there were also fishermen, hunters, and craftsmen. This, together with territorial specialization in the production of certain food crops, gold, iron, and other products, gave rise to an exchange economy which expanded over time. In addition, variations in terms of resources gave rise to trade between the inhabitants of the sahel and the Sahara on the one hand, and those of the southern savanna and the forest region on the other hand. It has been estimated that trade between the inhabitants of the Sudan and those of the Sahara started as early as 500 B.C.

The first people to take advantage of this local and regional trade were the Soninke. With their advantageous position in the sahel, they were able to obtain gold and staples like rice and dried fish from the southern savanna in exchange for salt and copper which they obtained from the Saharan dwellers. Hence, from the beginning, the Soninke people occupied a middleman position, a situation which was enhanced by the trans-Saharan trade.

The significance of local and regional trade for the rise and development of the Sudanese states can be even better illustrated with the examples of Mali and the Hausa states. As already noted, the heartland of Mali Empire was within the fertile southern savanna and the upper Niger flood plain. The significant agricultural surplus from this fertile area helped to promote an internal exchange economy, wealth accumulation, and social stratification. At its peak, Mali expanded to embrace large parts of the southern savanna and the sahel. The significance of this is that diverse items were produced in the empire. Different areas specialized in the production of different crops. The majority of the people produced the savanna crops of sorghum, millet, and fonio, while rice was produced in the Gambian valley and on the upper Niger floodplain. Many of those who lived along the Sankarani and Niger were fishermen. The occupants of the sahelian grassland, which during the period of the Mali Empire was less fertile, were pastoralists who specialized in keeping cattle, sheep, and goats. Thus, farmers, fishermen, and pastoralists exchanged their products. Indeed, the diversity of primary products stimulated trade between the various parts of the empire. For instance, rice from the

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1000 BC

no
Jenke

Gambia was exchanged for iron from the central areas. Millet and sorghum from the southern savanna were exchanged for animals from the sahel, while dried fish from the riverine areas was supplied to various parts of the empire.

The large surplus derived from these diverse products, together with gold from Bure and Bambuk, placed the people of Mali in a very favorable middleman position, between the Saharan dwellers to the north and the forest dwellers to the south. Gold and kola nuts from the forest region, together with agricultural products like sorghum and millet, and dried fish from the southern savanna, were exchanged for salt and copper from the Sahara. The emergence of the skilled and professional long-distance Wangara or Dyula traders from the principal ethnic groups (Malinke, Bambara, and Soninke) of Mali Empire, was largely due to this very favorable position.

The greater part of Hausaland was fertile and could support the cultivation of variety of crops. The majority of the people were farmers who cultivated items like millet, sorghum, rice, maize, peanuts, beans, onions, cotton, and indigo. Some engaged in fishing and hunting. There were also pastoralists (particularly the Fulani) who raised cattle, sheep, and goats. One significant trend in parts of Hausaland, like Kano and Katsina, was the symbiotic relationship that developed between farmers and pastoralists, by which, in exchange for food, the waste from cattle was used as fertilizer. This increased agricultural productivity.

The diverse economic base of Hausaland was further enhanced by a variety of crafts. The high technical quality of the items produced was generally acknowledged. The articles produced included various iron implements for agricultural, domestic, and military purposes; leather items like bags, sandals, harnesses, and saddles; tunics and cloth; and pottery and baskets. This diverse economic base supported a great deal of domestic and regional trade. This trade greatly contributed to the development of the Hausa states. In particular, the high quality of crafts led to considerable demand for them in other parts of West Africa. For instance, Hausaland supplied leather goods to the Akan in exchange for kola nuts and gold dust. Hausaland also used its own middleman position to promote trade with Borno and the Sahara dwellers to the north and the Nupe and Yoruba to the south. Millet, slaves, eunuchs, clothes, fabrics, leather goods, hides, iron, and kola nuts were supplied to Borno and the Sahara in exchange for horses, camels, paper, dates, henna, salt, and other items. Items like salt, cloth, swords, hides, horses, and leather goods were supplied to Borgu, Nupe, and Yorubaland to the south, in exchange for slaves and kola nuts among other items.

The immense contributions of local and regional trade to the development of the Sudanese states have not received sufficient emphasis. The impression usually created is that these states owe their development mainly to the trans-Saharan trade. Yet, as is clear from the preceding discussion, domestic trade provided the material basis for the origin and initial development of the states. In fact, none of them owed their origin to the trans-Saharan trade. The states developed as responses to local geographical, environmental, and economic factors. But it cannot be denied that the trans-Saharan trade acted as a catalyst that helped to accelerate their development and expansion.

The trans-Saharan trade was carried on between traders from North Africa and their counterparts in the Sudan. But in fact it linked together North Africa, the Mediterranean world, Europe, the Sahara, the Sudan, and the forest region of West Africa. The trade, which started around the third century A.D., assumed a

Hausaland
Fulani

long distance traders

Gold
for
salt &
copper

Fulani
animal
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Trade
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Trade
Hem
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TST
800 AD

greater dimension from about the eight century. Although various articles were involved in the trade, the primary ones were horses and salt from North Africa and the Sahara, and gold and kola nuts from the South. Other items included textiles, copper, tea, coffee, sugar, cowries, writing paper, beads, and various European manufactured goods from North Africa and the Sahara; and millet, sorghum, gum, ivory, ostrich feathers, clothes, leather materials, and slaves and eunuchs from the Sudan and the forest region. It was the desire of rulers of the Sudanese states to have preponderant access to the primary imports (horses and salt), to have control over the main exports (gold and kola nuts), and to control the major routes and the important trading centers that provided a major impetus for expansion.

horses &
salt fr.
N. Africa
& Sah.

With its advantageous location in the sahel, it is not surprising that Ghana was the first of the Sudanese states to take advantage of the benefits of the trans-Saharan trade and embark on an expansionist course. Being ideally placed to play the role of middleman, Ghana expanded to control the surrounding communities that were the sources of some of the trade items. For example, it gained exclusive control over the gold-producing center of Bambuk and, by the eleventh century A.D., expanded northwards to impose its control over the Berber town of Awdaghost in the southwestern Sahara, which was an important trading center.

Awdaghost

However, the activities of the Almoravids and the decline of Ghana from the late twelfth century made it unsafe for traders to continue to use the trade routes that terminated in Ghana. This resulted in the diversion of the main trade routes eastwards, with some of them terminating in the heartland of the Mali Empire. By then, Bure had become a new source of gold while Timbuktu and Djenne had become important trading centers. Mali expanded to embrace Bambuk and Bure, as well as Timbuktu and Djenne. The determination of Mali to control all of the important trading termini in the Western Sudan led it to extend its authority over Gao and Tadmekka to the northeast. In addition, the Wangara penetrated the forest region to open new sources of gold from the Akan and Lobi fields, as well as to gain more advantage in the kola nut trade.

Mali

The contributions of the trans-Saharan trade to the expansion of the Sudanese states can be further seen in the case of the Songhai Empire. Although Gao, the nucleus of Songhai, developed into a kingdom at about the same time as Ghana and was an important terminus of the trans-Saharan trade, it did not begin to expand and gain more advantage from the trade until the middle of the fifteenth century. One reason for this is that Gao was not as well-placed as Ghana and Mali to control the trade in gold and kola nuts. Not until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when trade routes were extended to Hausaland, did the heartland of Songhai become focal point in the trade. Thus, apart from taking advantage of the decline of Mali to take over important trading centers like Timbuktu and Djenne, it expanded eastwards to exercise some form of control over parts of Hausaland and expanded northwards into the Sahara to impose its rule over the major trading and salt-producing center of Taghaza.

Songhai

Kanem, which was the nucleus of Kanem-Bornu Empire, was situated in the sahel, northeast of Lake Chad. It arose at about the same time as Ghana and Gao. Although before the fifteenth century the bulk of the trans-Saharan trade was concentrated in the western part of the Sudan, there was also a thriving trade from the Lake Chad region through the Central Sahara to North Africa. Fezzan, an important trading center in the Sahara, as well as Bilma, a salt-mining center,

Kanem

13th were located on these routes. It was the determination of Kanem to maximize the benefits from this trade that led it to bring these two areas under its control by the middle of the thirteenth century. By the end of the fourteenth century, the center of the empire was moved to Borno to the west of lake Chad. From there, the empire sought to extend its control over the trade in this area and, in particular, impose some form of authority over the eastern Hausaland.

Hausaland became fully integrated into the trans-Saharan trading network from about the fifteenth century. This contributed significantly to the expansion of some of the Hausa states. Katsina, which was the main entrepot of trade into the Hausaland, expanded north and south to bring neighboring groups under its control. Kano, because of the variety of its products, became an important center and sought to maximize this by bringing surrounding communities under its control. One reason that has been suggested for the struggle for supremacy in Hausaland between Katsina and Kano was the desire to control the trans-Saharan trade. To the south, Zaria was the gateway to the forest region and established trading links with Nupe, Borgu, and Yorubaland. It too expanded to bring its neighbors under its control.

1000 AD
gold to King
Customs
An important advantage from the trans-Saharan trade was the wealth the leadership derived from it. For one thing, the Sudanese rulers and other members of the ruling class were actively involved in the trade. In Ghana, for example, the people could only sell gold dust while gold nuggets were reserved for the monarch. Another important source of wealth was the various taxes which were imposed on both imports and exports. Al-Bakri wrote that a tax of one dinar of gold was levied on every donkey-load of salt which was imported into Ghana and two dinars for a similar amount of salt exported out of the kingdom. Also five mithqals were levied on every imported load of copper. Similar taxes were levied in the other Sudanese states. The wealth derived from these sources helped to provide the means to prosecute wars of expansion, and to promote social differentiation, specialization, and efficient administration.

It should be noted that in spite of the role played by trade, only few of the Sudanese people were full-time traders. The majority were farmers and thus agriculture remained the mainstay of their economies.

Islam

1000 AD
Islam played an important role in the history of the Sudanese kingdoms. Although it was not responsible for the rise of any of the empires, it contributed significantly to their development and expansion. Islam was introduced into the Sudan from North Africa and was mainly a product of the trans-Saharan trade. It is believed that Islam spread into the Western Sudan by the second half of the tenth century, the Chad region by the eleventh century, and Hausaland between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. By the end of the eleventh century some Sudanese rulers, notably those of Gao, Mali, and Kanem, had embraced Islam, but still the influence of the religion was restricted.

TS
Traders
& Islam
Since the introduction of Islam to the Sudan was essentially a product of the trans-Saharan trade, it should be expected that some of the groups on which it had its greatest impact were traders. Muslim traders from North Africa helped to

spread the religion in the Sudan. Hence, the first set of Sudanese people to embrace Islam were traders who were converted through their relationships with the North Africans. Of note in this regard were the Soninke and Malinke traders, some of whom became the famous Wangara or Dyula long-distance traders. They, as already noted, were responsible for opening up markets in gold and kola nuts in the forest region and, in the process spread Islam not only to a large part of the Sudan, but also to parts of the forest. Other notable Sudanese long-distance traders who converted and helped to spread it to other parts of West Africa were the Kanuri and the Hausa. The fact that both the North African traders and many of their Sudanese counterparts came to share the same religion helped to further promote the trans-Saharan trade.

The importance of trade made the Sudanese rulers take steps to guarantee the security and freedom of worship of North African traders within their kingdoms. This was not the case only with those leaders who accepted Islam, like those of Mali, Songhai, Kanem-Borno, and the Hausa states, but also with those that did not accept Islam, such as those of Ghana before the twelfth century. For instance, in 1067 A.D., al-Bakri wrote that the capital of Ghana was divided into two parts, six miles apart. One part was made up of Muslims and had twelve mosques, while the other part was occupied by the king and his people who were adherents of the traditional religion, though even this part had a mosque for use by Muslims who visited the king. In fact, many large Sudanese towns, like Djenne, Timbuktu, Gazargamu, Katsina, and Kano, had a sizeable number of Muslim traders. These towns also attracted Muslim scholars and clerics who, apart from contributing to the spread of the religion, helped to promote Islamic literacy and scholarship.

The acceptance of Islam by some Sudanese rulers affected the histories of their states in various ways. Some of them, like Mansa Musa of Mali, Askiya Mohammed of Songhai, Dunama Diblemi and Idris Aloma of Kanem-Borno, embarked on various jihads and, in the process, expanded the territorial extent of their kingdoms. Some of them went on pilgrimage to Mecca and returned with scholars, professionals, and ideas that helped to bring about changes in areas such as scholarship, administration, architecture, and warfare. In addition, it was believed that by going on pilgrimage such leaders acquired *baraka*, a form of spiritual power, which further helped to enhance their prestige and ensure the loyalty of Muslims among their subjects. Similarly, some of these leaders like Askiya Mohammed of Songhai and Ali Gaji of Kanem-Borno, sought and achieved appointment as caliphs of the Sudan - a position which made them the recognized leaders of the Muslims in the Sudan during their reigns.

The Muslim scholars and professionals who were employed as administrators and advisers helped to promote more efficient forms of administration in the Sudanese kingdoms. Of significance in this regard was al-Maghili's book on the Islamic form of administration, *The Obligation of Princes*, which he wrote for Muhammed Rumfa, the ruler of Kano, in the early 1490s. However, since most of the Muslim traders, scholars, and clerics lived in the urban centers and many of them were close to the seats of power, Islam in the Sudanese kingdoms remained primarily an urban religion and mainly for the ruling class, while the majority of the people remained traditionalists.

Although Islam contributed to the development and expansion of Sudanese kingdoms, it equally contributed to the decline and collapse of some of them. The

Common religion → trade

security & freedom of worship

Scholarship

jihad

Almaghili

some became caliphs

a class religion

constant skirmishes between the Muslim Berbers of the Sahara, particularly the Almoravids, and Ghana Empire in the second half of the eleventh century, contributed to the decline of the empire, especially since the resultant insecurity on the trade routes caused the diversion of trade from Ghana. The division between Muslims and non-Muslims (particularly among the ruling groups) in Songhai greatly contributed to its decline and collapse. It was the Sokoto jihad of the nineteenth century which brought about the collapse of the Hausa states.

The Empire of Ghana

Ghana was the first of the Sudanese kingdoms to rise to prominence. However, given the lack of written records and the antiquity of its rise, its early history is obscure. The importance of gold for the Arabs and Europe brought Ghana to the attention of the outside world by the eighth century when it was described by al-Fazari as "the land of gold." Although Bambuk, the source of the gold, was not under its direct political control, Ghana controlled the trade in gold. The location of Ghana on the southern edge of the Sahara resulted in control over the trans-Saharan trade, particularly the important trading center of Awdaghost. Conflicts with Saharan Berbers and the need to promote security along the trade routes led Ghana to develop more effective defensive and offensive military strategies. At the height of its power in the eleventh century, Ghana had expanded west to the Senegal River, south to the boundaries of the gold-producing area of Bambuk, east to the River Niger and north to Awdaghost. From the accounts of various Arabic writers, Ghana was a very wealthy kingdom, whose central administration derived income from a number of sources.

The empire was loosely organized and broadly divided into two - metropolitan Ghana, which was the nucleus, and provincial Ghana which was made up of conquered vassal states. So long as the vassal kings recognized the authority of the central government and paid their annual tribute, they were allowed to control their own internal affairs. In order to ensure their continued loyalty, a son of each of the vassal kings was kept in the palace of the king of Ghana as hostage. But the king also endeavored to see that justice was fairly administered. According to al-Idrisi, he went out every day asking those who felt that they had suffered from injustice to come before him so that he could look into their cases.

By the end of the eleventh century, Ghana had started to experience a process of decline. Some of the factors that accounted for this decline were Islam, trade, and the environment, the same factors that had been important in its rise. While many Soninke traders and rulers of vassal states became Muslims, the king remained an adherent of the traditional religion. Most of the Muslim Soninke and vassal states were, therefore, not prepared to continue to pledge their loyalty to their non-Muslim ruler, thereby creating divisions within the empire.

The constant feud between the Muslim Sanhaja Berbers and the Ghana Empire did not help matters. This reached its peak in the second half of the eleventh century when the Almoravids (an Islamic religious movement that emerged among the Sanhaja Berbers and embarked on jihads) retook control of Awdaghost from Ghana in 1054 A.D., and by 1070 A.D. had established an empire which stretched from the northern boundaries of Ghana to the Magrib. It

Almoravids
conquest
of Ghana

land of
gold

11000
AD

metropolitan
provincial

hostage
taking

1200
decline

religious
division

Almoravids
retook
Awdaghost

used to be claimed that the Almoravids overran Kumbi Saleh, the capital of Ghana, in 1076, but recent research has disproved this. But the conquest of Awdaghost and the diversion of trade routes to the east of Ghana beyond the control of its leaders deprived it of wealth and resources and weakened the central authority considerably.

Perhaps the greatest factor in the decline of the empire was environmental. Since it was located in the sahel which had been under continuous exploitation for a long time, the area became less fertile and could no longer support a large population. This was not helped by the fact that Berber pastoralists were pushing southwards into the area and were overgrazing the already-deteriorating environment. In the face of this environmental problem and deprived of wealth from the trans-Saharan trade, many Soninke had, by the beginning of the thirteenth century, started migrating southwards to form new settlements in the more fertile areas of the southern savanna.

Given these problems, the central authority became weak and could no longer impose its control over the vassal states which seized the opportunity to rebel. In 1203, one of them, the Susu state, under its leader Sumanguru Kante, declared its independence and overran the core area of Ghana. However, because of the tyrannical nature of Sumanguru's rule, his empire was ephemeral, and he was defeated in 1235 by Sundiata, who proceeded to establish the Empire of Mali.

1203
Susu
1235
Mali

Mali

The very favorable environment in which the heartland of Mali was located had by the tenth century, given rise to a number of Malinke chiefdoms in the western part of the southern savanna, around the upper Niger. By the twelfth century, Kangaba, which was situated in the valley of the Rivers Sankarani and Niger, had attained a form of ascendancy over the other Malinke chiefdoms. The immediate factors that accelerated the expansion of Mali into a large empire in the first half of the thirteenth century included the decline and collapse of Ghana, the discovery of new goldfields at Bure, the increased participation of Mali in the trans-Saharan trade, and the emergence of Sundiata as an able leader.

The decline of Ghana created a power vacuum which was initially filled by the Susu state. By the 1230s, Sumanguru had annexed the Malinke chiefdoms to the south of Susu. But Sumanguru was a tyrannical and oppressive leader, which united the Malinke in opposition to him. Sundiata, who was from the royal family of Kangaba, returned from exile and galvanized the Malinke opposition against Sumanguru whom he defeated at the battle of Kirina in 1235, thereby bringing an end to the Susu kingdom. After this victory, the leaders of the other Malinke chiefdoms recognized Sundiata as their leader and pledged allegiance to him. Sundiata then established Niane as the capital of Mali. In 1240, Sundiata sacked Kumbi Saleh and incorporated what was left of Ghana into the Mali kingdom. This marked the unquestioned emergence of Mali as the supreme kingdom in the Western Sudan.

Another factor which worked in favor of Mali during this early phase was the diversion of the trans-Saharan trade routes eastwards, with Walata replacing Awdaghost as the most important trading center in the southern Sahara, and

some of the trade routes terminating in Mali. The emergence of Bure on the southern border of Mali as the new and most important source of gold further enhanced the position of Mali in the trans-Saharan trade. An important task for Sundiata and his immediate successors was to maximize Mali's benefits from the trade by conquering the gold-producing areas and important trading centers. Thus, by the time of Sundiata's death in 1255, he had incorporated the gold-producing areas of Bambuk and Bure into the empire, and had expanded west to include the upper valley of the Senegal and the Gambia, and north to include the termini of the trans-Saharan routes in the sahel. Mali, therefore, controlled all the internal trade routes over which gold was carried northwards for the trans-Saharan trade. At the time of Sundiata's death he had effectively established the Mali Empire. The tasks before his successors were to consolidate and build upon his work.

Sundiata was succeeded by his son Mansa Uli (1255-1270), who was an equally powerful leader and continued to expand the frontiers of the empire. However, after Uli's death Mali entered a period of instability which was characterized by succession disputes, and the deposition and assassination of kings who reigned for very brief periods. The level of instability was such that Sakura, a freed slave, was able to usurp the throne at one point. He was, however, a powerful leader who further expanded the frontiers of the empire and promoted trade. The conquests of Uli and Sakura brought the important commercial towns of Walata, Tadmekka, and Takedda in the southern Sahara, as well as Timbuktu and Gao on the middle Niger bend, under Mali's control. Thus the empire had virtually reached the limits of its expansion by the time Mansa Musa (1312-1337), the most famous ruler of Mali, came to the throne in 1312 A.D.

Mansa Musa came to the throne against the background of royal instability which had considerably weakened central administration. His first task was to strengthen the central administration and consolidate its hold over the entire empire. He strengthened the army and used it to reconquer those territories which had used the instability at the center as an opportunity to rebel and declare their independence. In order to ensure the continued loyalty of the military, the battalion commanders were given important posts in the royal court. Islam was accorded a prominent position in the court while literate Muslims were employed as interpreters, scribes, treasurers, and advisers. While some of the provinces were administered by Mansa Musa's appointees, others were left in the hands of their traditional rulers, so long as they recognized the central government and sent their annual tribute.

Given the peace and security that prevailed under Mansa Musa, the empire experienced great prosperity, as both internal and external trade flourished. As already mentioned, the Wangara helped to open up the Akan goldfields and more sources of kola nuts, thereby increasing the volume of trade which passed through the empire. Customs duties were imposed on all goods coming into or leaving the empire. Also, taxes were paid on the diverse agricultural items and crafts that were produced in the empire.

The greatest act for which Mansa Musa is known was his pilgrimage to Mecca from 1324-1325. He was said to have performed the pilgrimage with a caravan of one hundred camel-loads of gold. He spent so lavishly in Cairo and Mecca that the value of gold fell in Egypt and did not recover for a number of years. He even ran out of money and had to borrow at exorbitant interest rates

before he could return home. Much has been written about the contribution of this pilgrimage to Mali in particular and the Western Sudan in general. For example, the pilgrimage brought Mali to the attention of the outside world, and it appeared on some European world maps in the fourteenth century. It attracted a number of Islamic scholars, professionals, and clerics, including al-Sahili whose new architectural designs helped to revolutionize the field in the Sudan. The scholars and traders who were attracted to Timbuktu helped to turn the town into an important educational and commercial center. These are significant contributions no doubt, but all things considered, this was a rather reckless and extravagant pilgrimage that amounted to an unnecessary waste of the resources of the empire. To say this is not to belittle the important contributions of Mansa Musa to the Mali Empire (he was certainly one of its greatest leaders) but to draw attention to the implications of praising the unedifyingly extravagant aspect of the pilgrimage. Despite Mansa Musa's attempts to promote Islam, the religion remained that of traders, the elite and the urban centers.

Mansa Musa was succeeded by his son, Mansa Maghan, who reigned for four years (1337-1341) and was succeeded by Mansa Musa's brother, Mansa Suleiman (1341-1359). Suleiman was an effective leader under whom the prosperity of the empire continued. However, after Suleiman's death, the empire witnessed an era of dynastic instability from which, this time, it never recovered. Hence, the period from the sixth decade of the fourteenth century was one of gradual decline. The vassal states seized this opportunity to rebel and declare independence. At the same time, Mali came under constant attack from the Mossi in the south and the Tuareg in the north. In 1433 the Tuareg captured and occupied Timbuktu. Mali's loss was Songhai's gain. Under Sunni Ali, Songhai replaced Mali as the dominant power in the Sudan. But unlike Ghana (and Songhai), which completely disintegrated, the Mali Empire only lost the non-Malinke groups as it shrank to its original nucleus in the Malinke heartland.

Songhai Empire

Gao, the nucleus of the Songhai Empire, emerged at about the same time with Ghana and Takrur. The location of Gao and Kukiya (the initial capital of Songhai) in the fertile Niger bend was an important advantage, making it possible for the area to support people with diverse occupations. This gave rise to an early exchange economy within the area. The Sorko were not only fishermen but had developed maritime warfare abilities. Hence, the initial course of Songhai's expansion was along the River Niger. Apart from the cavalry and the infantry, Songhai had the advantage of an effective naval force.

Although Gao was one of the earliest states in the Sudan and was an important terminus of the trans-Saharan trade, it was not until the fifteenth century that it began the process of transforming itself into a large empire. The reasons for this include the fact that unlike Ghana and Mali, Songhai was far removed from the sources of gold, the most important export of the Sudan, as well as the fact that it became a vassal state of Mali. It had to wait for an auspicious moment and the advent of able leaders who could exploit such a moment. This occurred with the decline of Mali; the increased participation of the Hausa states in the trans-Saha-

ran trade further enhanced the significance of Gao as a trading center and, perhaps more importantly, spurred the establishment of the Sunni dynasty.

The first dynasty in Songhai was the Dya. This was replaced by the Sunni dynasty which was established by Ali Kolen in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. Ali Kolen and his brother Salman Mari were said to be two Songhai princes who were held hostage in the royal court of Mali as a way of ensuring the continued loyalty of the Songhai to the Mali Empire. But Ali Kolen and his brother seized the opportunity of political instability in Mali in the late thirteenth century to escape, establish the Sunni dynasty, and declare Songhai's independence. This independence was shortlived as Songhai was defeated and brought back under Mali's control by Sakura. But the Sunni dynasty continued to build up a powerful fighting force including cavalry, infantry, and a navy, and bided its time waiting for the moment to strike. The opportunity came in the fifteenth century with the instability in Mali's royal court and the incessant attacks by the Tuaregs and the Mossi which preoccupied the empire on many fronts. Under the reign of Sunni Sulayman Dandi (d. 1464), Songhai began a process of gradual territorial expansion. He annexed the kingdom of Mema which had already declared its independence from Mali. It was however under the reign of Sunni Ali (1464-1492) that Songhai began the transformation into a large empire.

The first few years of Sunni Ali's reign were spent in consolidating his position and building up a formidable army with which he embarked on a long career of conquest. In 1469, he captured Timbuktu from the Tuareg, and in 1473 he captured the strategic and important commercial and educational town of Djenne to the southwest. In the early 1480s, he turned his attention to the Mossi who had been besieging the Walata -Timbuctu area, and by 1483 he succeeded in pushing them back into their own territory. He carried out expeditions against Masina to the west and launched various campaigns into the Mossi region, though he did not succeed in completely subduing them. It was on his return from a campaign against the Mossi in 1492 that he died in a drowning accident.

By the time of his death, Sonni Ali had succeeded in transforming Songhai into a large empire which stretched from the southern Sahara in the north to the region of the Mossi in the south, and from Djenne in the west to Timbuktu in the east. The empire controlled and dominated the trade routes and the grain-producing region of the Niger's inland delta. Since Sunni Ali's career was dominated by warfare, the military played an important role in the administration of the empire; some of them were appointed governors of newly created provinces while those conquered areas that willingly accepted Sunni Ali's authority were left under their traditional rulers, provided they paid their annual tribute.

Sunni Ali established the Songhai Empire on very solid foundations. In spite of this, he was unfavorably portrayed by Muslim scholars from whom we derive much of the information on Songhai's history. He was described as an impious, ruthless, and bloodthirsty tyrant. This was largely because of his persecution of Timbuktu Muslims, particularly those of the Sankore mosque who refused to accept his authority and were accused of supporting his Tuareg enemies. Sunni Ali was only a nominal Muslim and a believer in traditional religion whose adherents formed the basis of his support; but the problem between Sunni Ali and the Muslims was not really religious but political. What was at stake was the issue of loyalty and acceptance of his authority by the Muslims; Sunni Ali treated generously the Muslims in Djenne and those in Timbuktu who readily accepted his authority.

In any case, in spite of the criticism of Muslim scholars, Sunni Ali's unique position in Songhai's history cannot be denied. He is recognized in the peoples oral traditions as the greatest ruler of Songhai, richly deserving the title Sunni Ali the Great.

Sunni Ali's son and successor, Abu Bakr Dao, was ousted in a coup in April 1493 by one of Ali's generals, Askiya Mohammed (1493-1528), with the support of the Muslim factions in the empire. Askiya Mohammed turned out to be an able administrator who consolidated and built upon Sunni Ali's achievements. But by relying on Muslims to carry out the coup against Ali's son who was supported by the traditionalists, he set the stage for the division of Songhai between Muslims and non-Muslims which, in the long run, proved fatal for the empire. As a usurper, Askiya Mohammed alienated many adherents of the traditional religion who supported Ali's son. His immediate task was, therefore, to consolidate his position and win the support of the majority of the people. Towards this end he eliminated or expelled from the empire the surviving members of the two previous dynasties, and actively cultivated the support of Muslims as an alternative power base by justifying his coup on religious grounds. At the same time he did everything to try to win the support of the traditionalists while taking steps to ensure that future succession to the throne remained within his lineage.

In 1496, Askiya Mohammed went on a pilgrimage to Mecca which lasted for two years. In order to attract attention, the pilgrimage was organized in an even more extravagant manner than that of Mansa Musa. However, one major aim of the pilgrimage was to consolidate his acceptance by both Sudanese and non-Sudanese Muslims. Hence, while in Cairo he persuaded the Caliph of Egypt to recognize him as the Caliph of the Sudan. On his return he declared a jihad against the Mossi in 1498-1499. In addition he conquered Air to the east, Diara and Baghana to the west, and Taghaza, the salt-producing and trading center, to the north. With the conquest of Taghaza, Songhai was in full control of the salt and gold trade in the Western Sudan.

Askiya Mohammed took a number of steps to strengthen Islam. He patronized and cultivated Muslim scholars, particularly those in Timbuktu, a town which he turned into a leading educational and commercial center, and those from North Africa and the Arab world. The status of Gao and Djenne as commercial and religious centers was enhanced. Muslims were employed in important administrative positions in the empire, and Islamic laws were employed in matters like taxation and in the implementation of justice in matters involving Muslims. The celebrated Arab scholar, al-Maghili, spent some time in the royal court as an adviser to Askiya Mohammed. Although Islam was considerably strengthened, Askiya Mohammed, like Mansa Musa, was wise enough not to alienate the majority of the common people by forcing the religion on them. In fact, he retained a number of traditional practices in the palace. Islam in Songhai was essentially a religion of the urban centers, the elites, and the traders.

There was a central administration under the direct control of Askiya Mohammed. The rest of the empire was divided into two broad regions, each with an administrator. The Islamized part of the empire was the western region while the non-Islamized part was the eastern region. Each was divided into provinces, with administrators appointed for some areas while those vassal states that readily accepted the central authority were left under their traditional rulers so long as they paid their tribute regularly. As with Ghana and Mali, revenues were derived from

various forms of taxation and customs duties, while there was also a number of state-owned farms worked by slaves and craftsmen who produced various items for the central authority. Askiya Mohammed's major contribution to Songhai was that he completed and consolidated its transformation into a large and prosperous empire.

Askiya Mohammed's achievements notwithstanding, the empire began to have problems even during his lifetime. Even when he had become old and blind, he refused to hand over power, and in 1528 he was deposed by some of his sons. There ensued a period of royal instability, depositions, and assassinations among his descendants who were constantly vying for the throne. As with Mali, this sparked a period of decline. In 1588 the division in the empire between Muslims and traditionalists was clearly manifested in the civil war over the struggle for the throne between Askiya Ishaq II, who was supported by the traditionalists, and Sadiq, who was supported by the Muslims. Although Ishaq II emerged victorious, the empire came out from the war considerably weakened and divided. This was to act as an impetus for the final factor which brought about the collapse of Songhai, that is, the Moroccan invasion of 1591.

The cupidity of al-Mansur, the Moroccan sultan, had made him covet the wealth of the Western Sudan. He planned to attack the area and take control of the trade routes and the gold. He realized that he could not make such a move against a formidable empire, so in 1582 he sent a spy to Gao to report to him on events within the empire. He saw in the outcome of the 1588 civil war an opportunity to strike; so after some careful planning, he dispatched in 1591 a force of four thousand well-armed soldiers, the majority of them Andalusians, under the leadership of Judar Pasha, a young Spanish eunuch in the sultan's employ. Although Songhai was able to muster a large army greatly outnumbering the invaders, its spears, bows, and arrows were no match for the firearms of the invading force and at the battle of Tondibi in March 1591, the Songhai army was completely routed. The victorious invaders imposed a regime of savagery and terror which led to the disintegration of the economy and society of the Western Sudan and to the shift of the trans-Saharan trade routes eastwards into Kanem-Borno and Hausaland.

Kanem-Borno Empire

The circumstances that resulted in the emergence of the Kanem-Borno Empire were similar to those obtaining at the emergence of the early sahelian states of Takrur, Ghana, and Gao. The desiccation of the Sahara attracted people from various parts of the central Sahara to the Chad basin. This amalgam of people included farmers, fishermen, and pastoralists. By the beginning of the tenth century A.D., a group of negroid nomadic pastoralists, the Magumi, became ascendant and established the Safuwa dynasty which was to rule Kanem-Borno for a thousand years. This set in motion a gradual and prolonged process of welding the various peoples into a common cultural group which came to be known as the Kanuri. Some traditions of the Kanuri credit the origin of the Safuwa dynasty to a great Arab hero, Sayf b. Dhi Yazan, who, it was claimed, gained control of the Magumi and established the dynasty. These traditions are obviously not correct.

Apart from including elements of the discredited Hamitic hypothesis, they represent a general tendency among Muslim rulers in North Africa and the Sudan to trace their pedigree to great Arab heroes as a way of winning prestige and respectability in the Muslim world. The Magumi were negroid nomads. It was the conflict that resulted from diverse people settling in the Chad basin that eventually gave rise to a resolution through the Magumi ascendancy.

However, in order to promote unity and win the acceptance of the various ethnic groups that made up Kanem, the Safuwa rulers pursued a deliberate policy of marrying non-Magumi women. It was from among the children of these non-Magumi women that successors to the throne were selected. This helped the Safuwa to win the support and acceptance of the other groups. Also, the introduction of the institution of divine kingship helped to promote the supremacy of the Safuwa. By the thirteenth century, Njimi had been established as the permanent capital of Kanem.

As in the Western Sudanese kingdoms, trade and Islam contributed to the expansion of the Kanuri empire. Islam was introduced through peaceful methods by traders from North Africa, and in the late eleventh century Mai Humai became the first Safuwa king to be converted to Islam. Succeeding rulers consolidated the position of Islam in the royal court and performed the pilgrimage. With the aid of a superior cavalry force, Kanem was able to bring the surrounding areas under its control. But it was not until the thirteenth century, in the reign of Dunama Dibalemi (1210-1248), that Kanem embarked on a deliberate and conscious policy of expansion. Dibalemi had a cavalry force of 4100 horsemen. Determined to bring the trade through the central Sahara under Kanem's control, he expanded the empire northwards into the desert to capture the important salt-producing and trading center of Bilma. At the same time, he engaged in wars with the neighboring So people, justifying them on the grounds of a jihad, although captives were sold as slaves in exchange for horses from North Africa. It was under Dunama Dibalemi that Kanem attained its peak.

After Dibalemi's reign, Kanem started experiencing a number of internal and external problems. Internally, there was royal instability in the form of succession disputes and assassinations of ruling kings. This weakened the central authority and some vassal states seized the opportunity to rebel. The Fezzan declared its independence from Kanem. By the fourteenth century, Kanem was experiencing fierce resistance and attacks from the So people west and south of Lake Chad. In the second part of the fourteenth century Kanem came under constant attacks from the Bulala, who were so successful that on occasions they occupied the center of Kanem and at least three kings were said to have met their deaths at the Bulala's hands.

The situation was compounded by economic problems. The location of Kanem in mostly desert and semidesert areas meant that the soil soon became exhausted from overgrazing and could no longer sustain a viable economy. Moreover, during the fourteenth century, Borno, which had been established as a tributary state of Kanem to the southwest of Lake Chad, seized the opportunity offered by the weakened central administration to assert its independence. It stopped paying tribute and began to bypass Kanem in the trans-Saharan trade. Kanem lost much of what it had derived from the trade. All these problems resulted in the collapse of the Kanem state towards the end of the fourteenth century. The Safuwa dynasty under Mai Umar b. Idris (1382-1387) decided to save the state from complete disintegration by relocating to the more strategic and fertile region of Borno.

In spite of this relocation, the first century of the Safuwa stay in Borno was full of problems and troubles. Dynastic instability continued and was accompanied by the revolts of powerful title holders while Bulala attacks remained unabated. In fact, two more kings (Sa'id and Kadai Afunu) died from Bulala attacks. Thus, the primary aim of moving to Borno, which was to reorganize the empire and build a strong economy, could not be realized during this period. On the contrary the very survival of the state was at stake.

Fortunately for Borno, the accession to the throne of Mai Ali Gaji (1465-1497) brought about an end to this period of instability and launched Borno towards greatness. One of Ali Gaji's achievements was the defeat of the Bulala in about 1471, temporarily putting a halt to their harassment. Perhaps his greatest achievement was the building of a well-fortified permanent capital, Birnin Gazargamu, for the empire. Apart from being well-fortified, Gazargamu was strategically placed to control a great part of the commerce to and from Hausaland. Ali Gaji was also an Islamizer who tried to strengthen the position of Islam in the royal court. He was invested with the title of caliph during his pilgrimage in about 1484 and from this time on successive Borno rulers claimed the title, caliph of the Sudan.

Ali Gaji's son and successor, Mai Idris Katakarmabe (ca. 1497-1519) built upon the policies of his father. The first threat he had to deal with was renewed Bulala attacks. He defeated the Bulala on two occasions and drove them out of Njimi which he occupied for a period. After concluding a treaty with the Bulala, he returned to Borno. But this peace was shortlived as occasional Bulala attacks continued until the reign of Idris Aloma in the second half of the sixteenth century. The kings that immediately succeeded Idris Katakarmabe continued to deal with the Bulala threats, embarked on some wars of expansion particularly along the southern border, tried to secure and control the trans-Saharan trade routes, and continued with the policy of Islamization. By the middle of the sixteenth century, Borno was developing as a great center of Islamic learning which was visited by scholars from all over the Islamic world. Moreover the claims of successive kings to the title of caliph was accepted by many Muslim scholars. It was this that was probably responsible for the sending of regular gifts, as opposed to tribute, by Muslim rulers in Hausaland to the Kanem-Borno rulers.

It is generally agreed that the Kanem-Borno Empire attained the peak of its glory in the reign of Mai Idris Aloma (ca.1569-ca.1600). His contributions included the introduction of new military technology and strategies, the ending of the Bulala threats, the expansion of the Kanem-Borno Empire to its limits, the building of a strong economy, and the Islamization of the empire. Since Idris Aloma saw the achievement of lasting peace as a *sine qua non* for the attainment of the objectives of Kanem-Borno, his first act was to introduce military innovations which would enable the empire to withstand the threats from various quarters. Apart from having a standing army made up of infantry and cavalry, he acquired Turkish muskets and musketeers, and introduced regular military drills. The acquisition of firearms and the introduction of military discipline gave his army supremacy over its enemies who still relied on the use of spears, bows, and arrows.

Having strengthened the military, he waged a series of wars against the Bulala whom he subdued; he finally achieved a lasting settlement with them. He used force to bring various groups who had continuously defied Borno's authority, like the Ngafata, the Talata, the Dugurti, the Kotoko, the So, the Buduma, the Bedde, and the Ngizim, under the empire's control. He asserted Borno's authority over

the Ahir, the Tuareg of Demergu, the Teda of Jawana, and Bilma, all of whose incessant attacks had been disturbing the trans-Saharan trade. With the empire's control extended over all the major trade routes, Borno became the nerve center for both the east-west trade from Hausaland and the trans-Saharan trade. Gazargamu became the terminus for the Borno-Kawar-Tripoli trade route as well as for the main routes to Hausaland. Thus, Borno achieved a very strong and viable economy.

One of the activities of Idris Aloma on which much was written by Muslim scholars was his proselytizing. He was an Islamizer who campaigned relentlessly against lax morals, and he established Islamic juridical systems in Borno. He attempted to Islamize the royal court and he appointed Muslim scholars to administrative positions. In fact the *ulama* (scholars) came to occupy very important and prestigious positions in Kanem-Borno. Under the conditions of peace and security that reigned, Islam grew and the empire became an important center of Islamic scholarship. But like Mansa Musa and Askiya Mohammed, Aloma could not completely Islamize the central administration. Syncretism was prevalent and Islam remained mainly the religion of the elite, traders, and urban centers. Externally, Idris Aloma established diplomatic relations with foreign governments, such as the Ottoman Empire and Morocco. By the time of his death in about 1600 A.D., Kanem-Borno had reached its apogee and his period is usually regarded as its golden age.

It used to be believed that Kanem-Borno declined soon after the death of Idris Aloma. But recent research has shown that this is not correct. On the contrary, the four immediate successors of Aloma in the seventeenth century consolidated his achievements and, since they were not involved in many wars, they used their time to promote more effective administration, commerce, and scholarship. Borno was a center of learning and culture, and the Kanuri culture and institutions spread to surrounding groups like the Hausa, where they were widely adopted.³

However in the eighteenth century, particularly from the mid eighteenth century, Kanem-Borno did enter a period of decline. Many of the kings were said to be indolent, corrupt, and increasingly syncretistic, while they lacked military fervor. As would be expected, many vassal states seized this opportunity to rebel. Raids from the Bedde disrupted the trade routes to Hausaland; Tuareg attacks disrupted the trans-Saharan trade and led to the capture of Bilma. Finally, the Fulani jihad of the nineteenth century resulted in the collapse of the Safuwa dynasty and its replacement by the Kanemi dynasty. Though the jihad further led to the loss of vassal states, the new dynasty succeeded in reorganizing metropolitan Borno and turned it into a strong Islamic community. It was only in the early twentieth century that Borno lost its independence to the British colonial invaders.

The Hausa States

Unlike the other parts of the Sudan already examined, Hausaland did not produce a single large empire. On the contrary, there existed a number of Hausa

3. In fact, Barkindo has argued that given the prosperity, educational, and cultural flowering of Borno in the seventeenth century, it is this century, rather than Idris Aloma's period, that should be regarded as the golden age of Kanem-Borno. See Barkindo (1992), 511.

states which were, for the most part, mutually antagonistic and competing with each other for supremacy. The fortunes of each state varied over time and no single state remained the most powerful throughout. Not much is known about the early history of the Hausa states. In fact, we do not have much information on this area until about the fifteenth century, and even then the amount of information we have on the individual states is uneven. But as previously noted, the greater part of Hausaland is located in the fertile savanna which, at a very early period, gave rise to a number of village settlements.

From about the eleventh century a form of revolution began in Hausaland which was manifested in the gradual transformation of some of these settlements into state-like organizations. This process of transformation is believed to have lasted till about the fifteenth century. It gave rise to the emergence of various centers of power. Closely associated with this revolution was the foundation of *birni* (cities) as new centers of political power. The factors that usually influenced the establishment of *birni* were economic, strategic, and defensive. Thus, a *birni* was always located in an area that could provide enough food to sustain the people during a period of prolonged siege, as well as being easily defensible. Because of these defense considerations, the *birni* was always a well-fortified walled city. The power of each Hausa ruler extended beyond the *birni* as the surrounding communities looked to him for protection from external attack. In fact, during prolonged attacks, the surrounding communities moved into the walled cities for protection. The territory of these states extended beyond the walled cities; hence it is not strictly correct to refer to them as city-states.

The leading Hausa states that emerged were Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Gobir, Zamfara, and Zaria. With the possible exception of Kebbi, the trans-Saharan trade played an important role in their development and expansion. Katsina was an important trading terminus and the entrepot of the trans-Saharan trade into Hausaland. This, and the diverse resources of Kano, which included agriculture and manufacturing, turned it into the leading commercial center in the Hausaland. For its own part, Zaria controlled the trade with southern groups like the Nupe and the Yoruba. In addition, like the Wangara, many Hausa people became long-distance traders. Hausaland came to occupy an important position in the west-east trade in kola nuts and gold from the Akan, and the south-north trade in kola nuts and slaves.

Islam also played an important role in the history of the Hausa states. The introduction of Islam into Hausaland has been credited to the Wangarawa in the fourteenth century. It is now agreed that Islam in Hausaland predated the Wangarawa and was probably introduced as early as the twelfth century, but it did not become an important factor until the advent of the Wangarawa and the increasing participation of the Hausa states in the trans-Saharan trade during the fifteenth century. It was from the late fifteenth century that the rulers of some Hausa states, like Mohammad Rumfa of Kano and Mohammad Korau of Katsina, actively embraced and propagated Islam in their domains. Much is known about Mohammad Rumfa, who was perhaps the first ruler to give serious thought to the problems of governing a multi-religious community in line with Islamic laws. Al-Maghili wrote him a treatise on Islamic administration. Through the patronage and activities of Hausa rulers, Muslim scholars and clerics from all over the Sudan were attracted to Hausaland, and cities like Kano and Katsina became centers of Islamic education. However, as in other parts of the Sudan, Islam did not

gain much influence outside the royal courts and urban centers. It remained essentially a religion of the elite. Even among Muslim Hausa rulers, syncretism was prevalent and this gave rise to the jihad of the nineteenth century which brought about the collapse of the Hausa states.

An important theme in the history of the Hausa states was constant warfare. This included the internecine warfare between Kano and Katsina, lasting from the second half of the fifteenth century to 1651 when an enduring peace was finally signed. The *ulama* community in both Kano and Katsina played an important role in negotiating this peace. A common explanation that has been given for this warfare is that it was a struggle between the two states for the position of the trans-Saharan terminus, but D. Laya has pointed out that it was probably much more than that.⁴ The warfare also represented a struggle for hegemony over eastern Hausaland. In the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, Kebbi was the dominant military power in Hausaland. It defeated Borno in 1561 and was also involved in wars with Zamfara and Gobir. In the eighteenth century there were wars between Zamfara and Gobir, while on different occasions both states were involved in wars with Katsina and Kano.

Administratively, each Hausa state was headed by a king known as the sarki, and under him was a retinue of fiefholders and officials. The Hausa states had access to varied resources and were therefore very rich, Kano being the richest. The central administrations derived revenue from a number of sources, including taxes (like custom duties, land tax, tax paid by craftsmen and traders, and cattle tax), gifts from government officials and dignitaries, and war booty. In the end, the Hausa states lost their independence to the Fulani jihadists of the nineteenth century who founded the Sokoto Caliphate.

Conclusion

The Sudanese kingdoms were remarkable in a number of ways. They all represented conscious attempts to take advantage of their environment, trade, and Islam to evolve large, centralized kingdoms. However, while the kingdoms in the west could not survive their internal and external problems, those in the central and eastern areas developed more resilience. One important factor which worked against the western states, particularly Ghana and Songhai, was location in the sahel, an area which became quickly depleted of resources. Kanem escaped such a fate by relocating to Borno. Moreover Kanem-Borno was fortunate not to have been confronted with a neighboring state that was bent on transforming itself into an empire. Among the Hausa states, there was a form of balance of power and, thus, no single one of them could impose its imperialism on the others for any lengthy period.

4. See Laya (1992), 458.

Review Questions

1. Discuss the extent to which environmental factors contributed to the rise and development of the Sudanese kingdoms.
2. Assess the contributions of trade to the development of the Sudanese kingdoms.
3. To what extent can it be said that Islam was both a positive and a negative factor for the Sudanese kingdoms?
4. Examine the impact of effective leadership and succession disputes on the rise and fall of any of the Sudanese kingdoms.

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