

# SAHARAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION

## NEWSLETTER

Volume 2, No 1, May 1994

### INTRODUCTION

The *Newsletter* is the principal organ of the Saharan Studies Association, a body of scholars with common interests, associated with the African Studies Association of the United States. The *Newsletter* will be published twice a year in the Spring and Fall and is designed to be a forum for the exchange of news about publications, projects and scholarly debates in our chosen area.

Broadly speaking, the aim of the Association is to foster collaboration and exchange of information between interested scholars in a variety of disciplines ranging through the arts, the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences, as they encounter new research materials, engage with local fieldwork problems and seek avenues for bringing the results of their research to a wider circle of colleagues. Given that French is the *lingua franca* of much of north Africa, the Sahara and West Africa, we shall be happy to publish communications and comments in French as well as English, though we regret

that we are not in a position to publish a fully bi-lingual newsletter.

Membership in the Saharan Studies Association is open to all interested persons. The annual dues of US\$10 (or Sponsoring Membership of US\$25) entitle members to receive the *Newsletter* and any other occasional publications, and to present papers at panels sponsored by the Saharan Studies Association at annual meetings of the African Studies Association and the Canadian Association of African Studies. The annual business meeting is held during the ASA meeting in November/December each year. As of May 1994 membership totalled approximately 50, from the USA, Canada, Gt Britain, France, Norway, Spain, Morocco, Japan and Cameroon. We hope existing members will pass on information about the Association and actively recruit new members. Contributions for the Fall 1994 *Newsletter* should be sent to :

John Hunwick, Department of History, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 60208, USA (fax: 708 467-1393, email: jhunwick@casbah.acns.nwu.edu), or

Ann McDougall, Department of History, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, CANADA T6G 2H4 (fax: 403 492-9125, email: amcdouga@vm.ucs.ualberta.ca)

It would be extremely helpful if contributors could submit items in both paper and electronic copy. John Hunwick will be editing the Fall 1994 issue and he would prefer material sent to him by email or, if on disk using the Microsoft Word program, though most other programs can be handled.

Membership dues should be sent to Priscilla Starratt, Humanities, Box 43, 23 Bridge Street, New England College, Henniker, NH 03242, USA.

### MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING, 4 DECEMBER 1993

*The meeting was held during the course of the 1993 African Studies Association annual meeting in Boston. A similar meeting will take place during the 1994 ASA meeting in*

*Toronto. Look out for announcements at the conference.*

[over]

1. The meeting began with the Treasurer's report, as the Chairperson had been delayed.

2. At that time, we had 42 members. One had paid for two years. Twelve had paid for sponsoring memberships, which had not been awarded. The Treasurer noted that a few foreign checks had not been collectable due to the collection policies of her parochial village bank. It was suggested that she move the account to a bank in Cambridge or Boston that would have global collection facilities. She was advised to wait for another year before spending the \$150-\$300 required to file for tax exempt status.

3. It was suggested that a page be added at the end of the next newsletter with a form for new members. The SSA address could be added on its reverse side for easy mailing. It was also suggested that as only 7 of our 42 members were from Africa, that we consider sponsoring all of the African members, so they would not need to go to difficult lengths to obtain dollar checks for membership. An announcement to this effect should be placed in the new membership form, to be added to the newsletter.

4. It was noted that ASA affiliate/associate membership could be arranged when 1/3 of the members are ASA members. It was felt that this status helps in getting panels accepted by the ASA panel committee. It was suggested that we find out from MANSAs how to arrange this affiliation.

5. Members requested that a membership list with postal and email addresses, phone and fax numbers and members' areas of interest be circulated to all members, as one of the benefits of the SSA was networking with colleagues of similar interests.

5. Jim Webb of Colby College, Maine, agreed to try and set up two SSA sponsored panels for the next ASA meeting in Toronto. One would likely be on 18th/19th century trans-Saharan trade and the other on women/gender/sexuality issues. He agreed to be the panels/grants liaison person for the SSA.

7. The Treasurer, Priscilla Starratt, reported on

her experience at the opening of the Africa exhibit at the Field Museum, Chicago. Members agreed that the SSA could contribute to this exhibit by adopting the Saharan section of the exhibit and applying for joint grants for materials, research and outreach activities with the museum. Starratt was also asked to serve as Secretary.

8. Ann-McDougall agreed that she and John Hunwick as Co-Chairs, would put out the next newsletter. It was decided we would try to have two a year.

9. Membership forms were distributed, and Newsletter #2 for those who had not received it yet. The meeting ended with refrains of "Next year in Tamantit" . . . alias Toronto.

Recorded by Priscilla Starratt

PANELS PROPOSED BY THE SAHARAN  
STUDIES ASSOCIATION FOR THE 1994  
AFRICAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION MEETING,  
TORONTO

(1) NEW RESEARCH ON SAHARAN TRADE

*Chair:* James L.A. Webb, Jr. (Colby College)

*Papers by:*

Katherine P. Moseley (Institute of African Studies, Rabat), "The Moroccan South, Oasis Social Structures, and the Trans-Saharan Trade"

G. Michael LaRue (Clarion University), "From the Asyut to the Zaribas and Back Again: The Transformations of Dar Fur's Trans-Saharan Trade in the Nineteenth Century"

Chouki El Hamel (Duke University), "Trade and the Transmission of Islamic Knowledge in the Western Sahara and sub-Saharan Africa (19th century)"

James L.A. Webb, Jr. (Colby College), "The Mid Eighteenth Century Gum Arabic Trade and the British Conquest of Senegal (1758)"

*Discussant:* Daniel Schroeter (University of California at Irvine)

(2) MOTHER'S MILK, BLOOD, AND FLESH: GENDER  
AND FEMALE POWER IN SAHARAN ARAB SOCIETY

*Co-Chairs:* Rebecca Popenoe and Timothy Cleaveland

*Papers by:*

Aline Tauzin (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique): "Du féminin en Mauritanie: entre glorification et contrainte" ["Femininity in Mauritania: between Glorification and Constraint"]

Rebecca Popenoe (Fellow, Carter G. Woodson Institute [UVa] and University of Chicago): "Expressions of Arab Identity through the female Body among Nigerien "Moors"

Raymond Taylor (University of Illinois, Urbana): "Family, Faction and Tribe: Gender and the Language of Political Solidarity in the Southwest Sahara, 1860-1880"

Timothy Cleaveland (University of Florida): "The Social Construction and Mechanics of Milk Kinship in a Nineteenth Century Saharan Oasis"

*Discussant:* to be Announced

*Panel Outline:*

Within a considerable body of literature on the history, socio-political organization, and economic lives of the Saharan Arabs known commonly as 'Moors', there is a glaring lack of attention to the less public domain of women's lives and their part in culture and society. Yet in contrast to widespread assumptions about the marginality of women to the public sphere in the Arab world, the papers in this panel will present an array of new research that demonstrates the centrality of women and women's lives to the political, social, and economic worlds of Saharan Arabic speakers from Mauritania to Niger. Through the little-studied social phenomenon of 'milk-kinship' and women's manipulation of marriages, by the use of highly gendered idioms of tribal relations, in the fattening of women's bodies, and in the verses of popular oral literature, an endo-vision of Saharan Arab culture emerges in which women occupy a much more central position than the literature would suggest. These papers also touch on the way in which gender is constructed in the Sahel and Sahara and explore how Islamic tenets, Berber

"survivals" and sub-Sahara African cultural elements are blended and re-configured in patterns unique to this vast stretch of Africa.

This panel is the first at the ASA or anywhere in the U.S. or Canada to examine this side of Saharan Arab (Moor) society and will bring together scholars from the U.S., Canada, and France.

[Timothy Cleaveland]

## NEWS OF GRADUATE STUDENTS

### 1. *Research in Progress*

*Rita Aouad-Badoual*, Université de Provence, prépare un Doctorat nouveau régime d'Histoire d'outre-mer, sous la direction de M. J.L. Miège, Professeur émérit à l'Université de Provence sur les incidences de la colonisation française sur les relations entre le Maroc et l'Afrique noire des années 1880 au milieu des années 1930. Date prévue pour l'achèvement du Doctorat: septembre 1994.

Mme Aouad-Badoual a soutenu sa maîtrise d'Histoire à l'Université de Provence, sous la direction de M. le Professeur J.L. Miège en septembre 1987, sur: *Aspects de l'esclavage marocain, 1880-1920*.

Ses publications sont les suivantes:

"Notes sur le problème de l'eau dans le commerce trans-saharien", *Ultra-marines, Bulletin des amis des archives d'outre-mer*, i, juin 1990, 3-10.

"L'esclavage tardif au Maroc", *Maroc-Europe*, i, 1991, 135-44.

"Tombouctou face à la conquête française". *Pays d'outre-mer. Mélanges en l'honneur de J.L. Miège. Etudes et documents de l'IHPOM*, Université de Provence, IV, 1993, 19-42.

"Les réseaux marocains en Afrique subsaharienne. Les Tekna de l'Oued Noun: le cas de la famille Benarba, 1880-1930", *Maroc-Europe*, iv, 1993, 93-114.

"Le rôle de °Abdine el Kounti dans la résistance nomade à la conquête de la boucle du Niger (1984-1902)", *Les cahiers de l'IREMAM*, iv, 1993, 35-47.

*John Wright*, School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London, is preparing a Ph. D. thesis on the Central Saharan slave trade in the mid-19th century.

He writes: The geographical area to be covered includes the Regency of Tripoli (roughly modern Libya), the Central Sahara, the Sudanic lands from which slaves were taken, and the Eastern Mediterranean outlets to which some of them were eventually shipped. The starting point is A. Adu Boahen's seminal *Britain, the Sahara and the Western Sudan, 1788-1861* (Oxford University Press, 1964), which has some, but by no means all, the essential background, including a 20-page chapter on the British Vice-Consulates at the important slaving entrepôts of Murzuk and Ghadames. A considerable expansion of this chapter will form the core of this work.

Essential features of the study will be the evolution of the trans-Saharan trade systems, and of the slave trade in particular, and the historical role of such places as Murzuk and Ghadames in them. The role of the various Saharan peoples involved to a greater or lesser extent—Tuareg, Tubu, Awlād Sulaymān and others—will be examined. Weight will also be given to the interests of powers other than Great Britain: the semi-independent Karamanli rulers of Tripoli, and after them the Ottoman Turks; the French in Algeria; the Sanusi religious confraternity in the eastern Sahara and the Sudan; and the various sub-Saharan states affected by the trade.

The British Vice-Consuls at Murzuk and Ghadames watched and reported on the Saharan slave trade for many years. What light do their reports shed in particular on the geographical origins of slaves, the routes they travelled, numbers, age and sex ratios, sales, prices and profits, destinations, treatment, morale, morality, and ultimate employment? Such information should help in making a fuller assessment of the scale of the Central Saharan trade during the critical mid-century years when it may have reached a brief peak before going into terminal decline. Knowledge of the origins of slaves, the identity of their

enslavers and the ways by which they crossed the desert should all contribute to an assessment of the relative importance of different routes at different times, and their respective roles in complex African and Mediterranean trading milieux. This in turn might suggest how politics and warfare, security and environmental factors may have influenced the conduct and patterns of such a spasmodic and unpredictable activity as the slave trade, almost from one season to another.

Main primary sources are the published accounts of (mainly) British travellers in the Central Sahara in the first sixty years of the 19th century. On file in the Public Record Office in London is the relevant multi-lateral correspondence between London and the British posts in the Sahara, Tripoli, the Libyan Mediterranean ports, Constantinople, and the slave-importing entrepôts of the Eastern Mediterranean. Reports of other European consuls in Tripoli may also be useful. Finally, there are the records of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society at Rhodes House, Oxford.

John Wright has published three books and many papers and articles on Libya. As he holds a full-time post with the BBC Arabic Service in London, completion of this present study is not expected before 1997-8.

*Timothy Cleaveland*, Department of History, Northwestern University, expects to defend his Ph. D. thesis "Home in Walata: a History of Marriage, Reproduction and Kinship in a Nineteenth Century Saharan Oasis" in September 1994. An abstract of it appears below, as does a research note by him on women and oral history in Walata.

In September Tim will take up a position as an Assistant Professor in the Department of History, University of Florida, Gainesville. Congratulations to him on being selected for this important position.

*Timothy Insoll*, St John's College, Cambridge University, is preparing a Ph. D. on "The archaeological recognition of the acceptance of Islam in the Western Sahel, 800-1200 AD".

Below is a report by him on some of the archaeological work he has so far undertaken in Mali.

## 2. *Theses defended*

The following information is culled from *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara*, no. 7, the contents of which are given below:

i) Maimouna Dao, mémoire de maîtrise d'histoire, Université de Ouagadougou, décembre 1991. Titre: *Le Wahhabisme à Ouagadougou de 1964 à 1988*.

ii) Khadim Mbacké, thèse de doctorat d'état en islamologie, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, 1991. Titre: *Le pèlerinage à la Mecque: le cas du Sénégal, 1886-1986*.

iii) Abdallah ould Khalifa ould Youba, thèse de doctorat, Université de Paris I, 1991. Titre: *Les aspects économiques et sociaux de l'oued Tijigja: de la fondation du ksar à l'indépendance (1660-1960)*. 3 tomes.

iv) Cécile Laborde, mémoire de troisième année, Institute d'études politiques, Université de Bordeaux I, mai 1992. Titre: *Particularisme Layenne et particularisme Lebou. La confrérie musulmane des Layennes du Sénégal. Quelques éléments pour une étude de la dynamique Islam/culture traditionnelle en Afrique*.

## 3. *Abstracts of Theses*

i) John Edward Philips, Ph. D. in History, University of California, Los Angeles, 1992. Title of thesis: *Ribats in the Sokoto Caliphate. Selected Studies, 1804-1903*.

When he became the ruler of the Sokoto Caliphate upon the death of his father Usuman Danfodio in 1817, Muhammad Bello was faced with widespread uncoordinated revolts. In order to overcome these revolts, increase central control over the society, and continue its expansion, Bello turned to a policy of building ribats, or fortified settlements, to

defend the frontiers and trade routes, as well as the major cities, of the Caliphate. The nature of these ribats, and the success they enjoyed in reconstructing the society according to the ideals of Bello, have been disputed, and are the major concern of this dissertation.

Three towns were chosen for study. The first was Wurno, Bello's own ribat and the place where he not only initiated the ribat policy, but where he also demonstrated this policy to subordinate emirs. The second was Takai, a major existing town on Kano's southeast frontier against Ningi, and the capital of the insurgent Yusufawa faction in the Kano Civil War. The third was Dambatta, a Fulani settlement dating from shortly before the establishment of the Caliphate which was converted into a ribat against first Kazaure and then Damagaram. These towns were studied using a combination of oral traditions, Arabic documents, travellers' accounts and colonial archival materials.

Ribats were shown to be central to the military aspects of society, not only as centers of defense, but also as staging points for offensive expeditions. They were peopled to large extent by slaves who practised warfare during the dry season. The ribats were also important for capturing more slaves in warfare. They also served as centres for the sedentarization of Fulani herders, and acted to promote agriculture and craft production. They were important in the administration of outlying districts. They functioned as centers for promoting the stricter Islam of the Caliphate society as well. In short, they assimilated many diverse groups of people into Hausa society and were responsible for the survival and spread of the Sokoto Caliphate and its ideals, helping to make modern Hausa society one of the most dynamic and expanding in Africa.

ii) *Timothy Cleaveland*, Department of History, Northwestern University. See above. He writes:

My dissertation, "Home in Walata: a History of Marriage, Reproduction, and Kinship in a Nineteenth Century Saharan Oasis", focuses on

the social power of women. Walata is a small oasis in the southern Sahara of West Africa and has been an important center of trade and Islamic learning for at least eight hundred years. Although Walata's society was patriarchal and conservatively Islamic, women were nevertheless able to carve out for themselves large spheres of power. In the nineteenth century Walata's women effectively dominated many aspects of the town's social relations, as well as the preservation and reproduction of local culture and history. By offering this view of Walata, my dissertation contradicts the received perception of conservative Muslim societies as strictly male-dominated. In addition, it provides a detailed explanation of the mechanics by which the women of Walata obtained and exercised power.

Through an examination of three social issues involving women—marriage, reproduction, and kinship, I attempt to explain the most important events and processes of the Walata's nineteenth century history. These three aspects of Walati society served as mechanisms through which the women of Walata, both free and slave, obtained power and property. Milk kinship, which arose through reproduction and affected marriage patterns, is one example of a powerful social mechanism which was used by the women of nineteenth century Walata. Women could establish milk kinship by breast-feeding another woman's child. In most respects milk kinship was similar to blood kinship. Indeed, in some instances it could create social bonds stronger than those between blood relatives. Milk kinship cemented relations between families, facilitated the assimilation of slaves into free families, and enhanced the financial and social security of ageing widows.

The issues of marriage, reproduction, and kinship are also essential elements of larger social phenomena which African historians have often left to anthropologists, such as: (1) the sedentarization of nomads; (2) the political organization and social dynamics of so-called 'segmentary' societies; (3) Saharan slavery and the absorption, rather than assimilation, of

slaves into Arab communities; and (4) the West African trade diasporas and the spread of Islam. For example, sedentarized nomads relied heavily on kinship ties created through intermarriage between families of the town and desert. Segmentary societies, while putatively based on patrilineal blood kinship, were actually political alliances cemented by strategic marriages and the resultant affinal and milk ties. Slavery was more valued by the Saharan elite as a system of reproduction than as a system of production. Indeed, in the process of reproducing and enlarging elite families, slave women and concubines created bonds of blood and milk kinship that enhanced the social clout of those slaves who were not absorbed into the Arab lineages. And finally, intermarriage between Walati elites and women from the sub-Saharan trade towns facilitated trade by creating kinship ties between Walatis and important Maraka, Soninké, and Fulbé families in the south. This, in turn, also encouraged the spread of Islam in general and enhanced the exchange of Islamic practices and ideas between the desert and savannah.

My research, which was funded by the Social Science Research Council, included 23 months in West Africa—17 months in Mauritania and 6 months in Mali. I did extensive work with Arabic manuscripts in family libraries in Walata (15 months), as well as in Arabic archives in Timbuktu (3 months), Paris (1 month), and Champaign-Urbana (1 month). In addition to archival work, I conducted more than one hundred interviews in Walata.

#### JOURNALS

*Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara*, no. 7, novembre 1993.

Muhammad Dahiru Sulaiman: Shiaism and the Islamic Movement in Nigeria 1979-1991.

Abdullah Hakim Quick: The Concept of *al-muwālāt* in the Sokoto Caliphate and the Resulting Dilemma at the time of the British

- Conquest.
- Matthew Hassan Kukah: An Assessment of the Intellectual Response of the Nigerian Ulama to the *Shari'ah* Debate since Independence.
- Musa Kamara; Saïd Bousbina (trad.) et Jean Schmitz (prés.): L'histoire de l'almaami Abdul (1727/8-1806), par Shaykh Muusa Kamara.
- Anna Pondopoulo: Une traduction "mal partie" (1923-1945): Le *Zuhūr al-basātīn* de Cheikh Moussa Kamara.
- Olivier Leservoisière: Histoire du peuplement et rapports financiers à Kaédi de l'époque des Farba à la conquête coloniale (xve-xixe siècle).
- Pierre Boilley: Aux origines de la question touarègue au Mali. Une exception coloniale: l'occupation pacifique de l'Adrar des Ifoghas.
- David Robinson: Malik Sy: un intellectuel dans l'ordre colonial au Sénégal.
- The issue contains other articles on subjects not related to Saharan studies as well as *comptes rendus* of theses, which are included under the rubric "Theses Defended" above.

[over]

*Al-Maghrib al-Ifriqi*, no. 2, décembre 1992*Paideuma*, no. 40, 1994

THE SOKOTO CALIPHATE AND THE EUROPEAN  
POWERS, 1890-1907

Edited by Paul Lovejoy & Sydney Kanya-Forstner

- A.S. Kanya-Forstner & Paul Lovejoy: The Sokoto Caliphate and the European Powers, 1890-1907.
- A.S. Kanya-Forstner: French Missions to the Central Sudan in the 1890s: the Role of Algerian Agents and Interpreters.
- Eldridge Mohammadou: Les sources de l'exploration et de la conquête de l'Adamawa et du Bornou allemands (1893-1903): Passarge, Dominik, Bauer.
- Albert-Pascal Temgoua: La conquête militaire allemande et son impact sur l'économie de

- l'Adamaoua, 1889-1906.
- Chinedu N. Ubah: The British Occupation of the Sokoto Caliphate: the Military Dimension, 1897-1906.
- Kabiru Sulaiman Chafe: Beyond the British Factor: Internal Challenges to the Hegemony of the Sokoto Caliphate.
- Martin Z. Njeuma: The Usmaniya System, Radicalism and the Establishment of German Colonial Rule in Northern Cameroon, 1890-1907.
- Ann O'Hear: British Intervention and the Slaves and Peasant Farmers of Ilorin, c. 1890-1906.
- Ken Swindell: The Commercial Development of the North: Company and Government Relations, 1900-1906.
- Tijani Muhammed Naniya: The Impact of the British Conquest on Interpretation and Application of the *Shari'ah*.
- Kimba Indrissa: Les révoltes paysannes et anti-coloniales à l'ouest du Niger, 1905-1906.
- John E. Lavers: The Awlad Rabih, 22 April 1900-23 August 1901.
- John E. Lavers: Trans-Saharan Trade before 1800: Towards Quantification.

Publication de l'Institut des Etudes Africaines, Université Mohammed V, Rabat. Parmi les contributions se trouvent les suivantes:

- Ahmed Chorki: Projet de Recherche: L'image du Bilād al-Sūdān au Maroc jusqu'à la fin du XVII<sup>ème</sup> siècle.
- Abdelwahed Akmir, Yahia Abou-Alfarah et Abdelmalek Bani Azza: La présence marocaine en Afrique de l'ouest: cas du Sénégal.
- Fatima Harrak: Mission to Nigeria.
- Mohammed Maniar (trad.): Deuxième lettre de secours envoyée par les gens de Tombouctou au Sultan Mawlay al-Hasan.
- Abdelmajid Benyoussef: Catalogue des fonds de manuscrits au Maroc.
- Mohammed Zniber: Une épître d'Ahmed Baba: Tuḥfatu-l-Fuḍalā.
- Daniel Roussange: Le chérif Hamâhoullah et l'ordre de la Tijāniya réformé.

Afraa Al Khatib: Compte rendu du numéro 97 (1992) de la revue *Al Wahda* sur "Les Arabes et l'Afrique".

#### RECENT BOOKS

- Abdellatif BENCHERIFA & Herbert POPP, *L'oasis de Figuig: persistance et changement*. Rabat: Faculté des Lettres-Passau: Passavia Universitäts Verlag, 1990.
- AHMAD BĀBĀ, *Tuhfat al-fudalā'* (*Des mérites des 'ulamā'*), texte établi par Said SAMI, traduit par Mohammed ZNIBER. Rabat: Publication de l'Institut des Etudes Africaines, 1992 [Série Textes et Documents, 3].
- Louis BRENNER (ed.), *Muslim Identity and Social Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*. London: Christopher Hurst, 1993.
- Seydou CISSÉ, *L'enseignement islamique au Mali*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992.
- Marc GABORIEAU, Nicole GRANDIN, Pierre LABROUSSE et Alexandre POPOVIC (éds.), *Dictionnaire biographique des savants et grands figures du monde musulman périphérique du XIXe siècle à nos jours*, fasc. 1. Paris: CNRS/EHESS, Programme de recherches interdisciplinaires sur le monde musulman périphérique, 1992.
- Roman LOIMEIER, *Islamische Erneuerung und politischer Wandel in Nordnigeria. Die Auseinandersetzungen zwischen den Sufi-Bruderschaften und ihren Gegnern seit Ende der 50er Jahre*. Münster-Hamburg: Lit Verlag, 1993 [Universität Bayreuth, Beiträge zur Afrikaforschung, Band 2].
- Jean-Pierre MAGNANT, (éd.), *L'Islam au Tchad*. Bordeaux: Centre d'étude d'Afrique noire, 1992.
- René OTAYEK (éd.), *Le radicalisme islamique au sud du Sahara*. Paris: Editions Karthala, 1993.
- MUHAMMAD SĀLIM b. al-Ḥabīb b. Ḥusayn, *Jāmi' al-muhimmāt fi umūr al-Riḡaybāt*, étude et traduction de Mustapha NAÏMI. Rabat: Institut universitaire de la Recherche Scientifique, 1992.

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN GAO, THE REPUBLIC OF MALI.

This short note provides a brief introduction to an archaeological research project which the author has been conducting in the city of Gao, the Republic of Mali, West Africa. Two research visits have been made to the Gao region, the first was an archaeological reconnaissance mission which was undertaken in January 1993, and the second visit comprised a six week excavation season in September and October 1993. These visits form part of the author's doctoral research project entitled, "The archaeological recognition of the acceptance of Islam in the Western Sahel, circa 800-1200 AD". The project aims to assess the spread and acceptance of Islam over the time period, 800-1200 AD, primarily in the Gao region. A multi-disciplinary approach is being adopted which has involved surface collection and survey programmes and limited archaeological excavation at the sites of Gao Saney and within Old Gao, henceforth referred to as Gao Ancien. A study of the relevant Arabic written sources and local oral historical sources is proceeding along with the archaeological research.

No more than a brief introduction to the geography of the Gao region is deemed necessary as it is assumed that the readership is familiar with the geography of the Western Sahel. The city of Gao is located within the sixth region of the Republic of Mali. Fieldwork has been concentrated within Gao Ancien and at the site of Saney situated approximately 4 kilometres to the east of the modern city of Gao, in the Tilemsi valley (Flight 1975a) (Figure 1). The occupation site at Saney forms a low mound rising to 8 metres above the surrounding terrain, and covers 30 - 40 hectares (Flight 1979). The mound is associated with a cemetery 100 metres to the east. Saney first came to prominence in the 1940s following the discovery of several



marble and chlorite schist grave stelae, subsequently dated to the twelfth century. The marble stelae were made in Almeria, (Muslim Spain), and were transported via Almoravid traders to Gao (Flight 1978). Several small excavations have been carried out at Saney since the 1940s, for example, by Raymond Mauny in the 1950s and Colin Flight in the 1970's (Flight 1975a, 1975b, 1979, Mauny 1951). Unfortunately these excavations have never been fully published.

The area of Gao Ancien is situated on the northeastern outskirts of the modern city of Gao and is bisected by the modern road leading to the town of Bourem, approximately 90 kilometres to the north of Gao. The area of archaeological remains is large in size and covers at least 2 square kilometres. Gao Ancien has been little explored archaeologically with only limited excavation by Raymond Mauny having taken place in 1950 at the 2.5 kilometre point on the road to Bourem. Mauny uncovered the remains of a large mosque, which he interpreted as possibly having been constructed in the mid-fourteenth century AD for the legendary Malian emperor Mansa Mūsā (Mauny 1951).

*The Reconnaissance Mission:*

The results of the survey have already been covered in detail elsewhere (Insoll 1993a), hence only a brief summary will be provided here. During January 1993 a collection of archaeological material was made at Gao-Saney, in the vicinity of the supposed mosque of Mansa Mūsā, and in other selected areas of Gao Ancien and its outskirts. This was undertaken both to provide a representative selection of pottery and other material for dating purposes and to assess the condition of the known sites and the potential for future excavation.

Suitable areas for excavation were located both in the vicinity of the "Mosque of Mansa Mūsā" site in Gao Ancien and at the northwestern end of the occupation mound at Gao-Saney. Excavation was deemed a necessity due to the damage both these important sites have suffered. Gao Ancien has

been damaged due to encroachment by the modern city of Gao, as it has expanded to accommodate the people flocking to the city in the wake of the Sahelian drought, whilst Gao-Saney has suffered from the activities of looters looking for beads and other items to sell (Insoll 1993b, 1994:in press).

A variety of different types of pottery were collected both from Gao Saney and Gao Ancien which share similarities with material collected by S. and R. McIntosh (1984) in the Gourma Rharous area which is situated on the River Niger to the northwest of Gao. These include several sherds from comb impressed carinated bowls, along with sherds of diamond hatched burnished red slipped wares, red slipped decorated and undecorated bottle necks, deep and shallow channelled red slip wares with painted white decoration, and sherds decorated in a checkerboard pattern of slipped and unslipped areas, delineated by comb impression. All these wares are described by S. and R. McIntosh (1984:3335) in their survey report. Sherds from comb impressed carinated bowls and checkerboard decorated wares were absent from Gao Ancien, but sherds from channelled and twine impressed wares were found.

An absence of tobacco pipe fragments from the surface of both the areas in Gao Saney and Gao Ancien which were walked was noticed. This was noted as a point of interest as tobacco pipes were not introduced to this area until 1591 AD (Mauny 1961:59 quoted in S. and R. McIntosh 1984:27), hence the indications were that the pottery assemblages collected from these areas predated the 16th century AD. The preliminary analysis of the surface collected material besides providing broad chronological indications enabled an initial familiarisation with the material to proceed prior to the commencement of the excavation season.

*The Excavations:*

The analysis of the finds and data from the excavations is still ongoing—hence the brief and provisional nature of the outline provided here.

The first trench was excavated in the south-west of the open area in Gao Ancien referred to as the "Mosque area" which was surveyed in January 1993. A 6 X 6.5 metre trench was excavated which revealed the remains in the western half of the trench of a substantial building constructed out of fired brick. Part of the floor and one of the column bases from this building was uncovered. The function of this building is as yet unknown, though it possibly constituted part of a merchant's house or of a public building. Traces of further cruder construction were found built over or abutting the fired brick building indicating that occupation of the site continued after the primary occupation of the fired brick building had ceased.

In total four occupation levels were identified. Underneath the fired brick building a dense layer of imported glass and pottery from various areas in North Africa and a variety of items of copper and iron work, and numerous beads were recovered. This layer, which has been provisionally dated to the 11th and 12th centuries AD on the basis of the imported pottery and glass present, illustrates that Gao was linked into the wider Islamic world during this period and that it was receiving material of good quality from North Africa.

Below this import-rich layer a cache of approximately 53 hippopotamus tusks was found. These tusks would appear to represent a consignment of ivory which was waiting to be shipped to North Africa and which was forgotten for some unknown reason. The discovery of this cache is of interest and an interpretation can be proposed to explain its presence. As the editor of this newsletter has remarked elsewhere (Hunwick 1985:4-5), the emergence of Gao as a commercial emporium of international fame does not seem easy to explain as it is far removed from the gold sources which are situated to the west of Gao. Salt and slaves were two commodities upon which the prosperity of Gao was founded and it is possible that ivory was another (Insoll: forthcoming).

Ivory was much sought after for use in the

ivory carving workshops in Egypt, the Maghreb and Andalusia (Islamic Spain). This ivory need not have been only from the elephant, as the working of hippopotamus ivory also has a long and much neglected history and has been worked since the Chalcolithic in the middle East, as well as being widely used in Dynastic Egypt (Brunton 1930, Barnett 1982). The interest which the North African merchants showed in Gao can be explained by the fact that they sought this valued commodity, ivory. The Sorko, the branch of the Songhai whose livelihood depends upon fishing and riverine mammal hunting are known to have specialised in hippopotamus hunting (Rouch 1948,1954). Along with the use of the hippo flesh as a source of food and once smoked, as a trade commodity (Hunwick 1985:5), it would be a natural step also to exploit the tusks as a further source of revenue (Insoll: forthcoming).

At present this interpretation does remain largely hypothetical; however a physical examination of collections of medieval ivory objects produced in Andalusia and North Africa is proceeding to see whether any of the ivory used in these objects does in fact come from the hippopotamus and not solely from the elephant.

The large amounts of locally manufactured pottery recovered from the excavations in Gao Ancien is similar to that collected during the survey in January 1993. Channelled wares, plain red slipped wares, and cord and twine decorated wares are present as are painted wares and comb impressed wares of various types. Similar wares were recovered from the excavation which was also conducted on the northwestern end of the mound at Gao-Saney. This excavation was on a much smaller scale, 2 X 2 metres, and due to the unstable nature of the deposits, a rubbish midden largely composed of ash, excavation was halted at a depth of 2.3 metres below surface level, which was before sterile deposits were reached. Owing to the fact that this area of the mound was made up of midden deposits no trace of structural remains were encountered. However,

a sizeable collection of faunal material was collected which is in the process of being analysed, and which will provide a body of economic data which again can be compared with the Gao Ancien material. Material for C14 dating was also recovered, which due to a lack of resources has not yet been processed. On the basis of the ceramic assemblage present, the excavated levels from the midden at Gao-Saney have been provisionally dated to the beginning of the second millennium AD.

It is hoped that once the analysis of the material recovered from the surveys and excavations in the Gao region is complete it will prove possible to begin to understand and reconstruct the development of Gao and its place within the Western Sahel and Sudan, and also its links with North Africa and the wider Islamic world beyond.

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#### Comment by John Hunwick

The discovery of a cache of hippopotamus

tusks is most interesting and does, indeed, raise many questions about mediaeval trade in ivory across the Sahara and the use of ivory in North Africa and Andalusia. As Mr. Insoll points out, we do not yet know whether ivory objects fabricated in those areas and dating from this period are of elephant or hippopotamus ivory. To the best of my knowledge the question as to the type and provenance of such ivory has never been raised. If there is evidence of hippopotamus ivory being used in such places early in the second millennium, then we must ask why this was so. Was it because it was more easily available, since we may presume that elephants, even in a relatively wetter period, were still only to be found considerably farther south than Gao, whereas hippopotami were available along the Niger between Timbuktu and Gao as Ibn Baṭṭūṭa discovered to his discomfort in the mid-fourteenth century? Or was hippopotamus ivory actually preferred, either because of some physical quality it possesses (a question to which I do not know the answer), or because its usage was not frowned upon by Mālikī law? It is perhaps not widely known that the use of elephant ivory is branded as "reprehensible" (*makrūh*) by the celebrated North African jurist Ibn Abī Zayd of Qayrawān (d. 386/986), the apparent reason being that it has to be taken from an animal that is not (for obvious reasons) ritually slaughtered (see Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī, *La Risāla ou Epître sur les éléments du dogme et de la loi de l'Islām selon le rite mālīkite*, texte arabe et traduction française . . . par Léon Bercher, 5th edn., Alger, 1960, 158-9, 296-7). Qayrawān was linked to Gao through routes passing by both Ghadames and Warghla and it is likely that Ibn Abī Zayd's strictures were well-known to North African merchants who received goods from Gao. We shall therefore await the analysis of ivory pieces from North Africa and Andalusia with much interest.

#### WOMEN AND ORAL HISTORY: A NOTE ON INTERVIEWING IN WALATA

My research proposal for my dissertation (see above), focused primarily on the process of sedentarization, and the cultural, social, and political impact of that process. At the time I feared that I would not be able to collect much information about women, given the relatively conservative character of Mauritanian Arab society. Happily, my experience in Walata was much more positive than I had expected. I conducted interviews during 17 months of research in Mauritania. Virtually all these interviews took place in Walata and most took the form of informal conversations with senior women in Hassaniyya (the regional Arab dialect). I recorded the highlights of these interviews at the time in English notes with key Hassaniyya words in phonetic transcription. I also conducted some interviews in French, or in a combination of French and Hassaniyya. In these cases I recorded notes in French.

In order to explain why most of my interviews were informal conversations with senior women I must describe Walati society and my experience there. Soon after arriving in Walata I learned that the town's nineteenth century permanent population consisted mostly of free and slave women, and their children. In the nineteenth century most of the free men were involved in trading activities south of the Sahara, which led them to resettle outside Walata or kept them out of town for nine months or more every year. In the absence of men, women often acted as the heads of households, supervisors of slaves, and inheritors of property. They were also the chief transmitters of local cultural knowledge.

Walata's late twentieth century population is even more disproportionately composed of women and children than in the past. Today Walati men are working in western Mauritania, not in the south, and are involved in petty trade and wage labor. The slave and servile people of the nineteenth century (Harratine) are now legally free, but they are still economically dependent on their former masters. Walati males generally leave Walata when they finish elementary school in order to seek work or more education. Only a small percentage of Walati females are allowed to

continue their education after Qurā'nic and elementary school. Young women have few opportunities to leave town, except through marriage.

I was surprised by the access I had to Walati women and by their vast knowledge of local history. While I was allowed very little access to pre menopausal women, I was able to spend a lot of time with the post menopausal women of several families with whom I cultivated close relations. In fact, I spent most of my social time in Walata with senior women. These women absorbed and preserved cultural and family history, and in this regard were generally much more knowledgeable than the men. Even when I interviewed men, much of the information would come from women. For example, I was not allowed to interview senior women from families I did not know well. Instead I would arrange interviews with senior males from such families. Often in these interviews I would pose questions to the male subject who would then relay the questions to a female relative sitting just outside the room, then repeat to me her response, which I was already in the process of recording.

In Walata I essentially lived with an extended family dominated by senior women, taking daily meals and tea with family members and their close friends. Most of my casual conversations were with senior women, and it was rare that an extended conversation did not touch on some topic of cultural or historical importance. When this occurred I took notes and usually asked for clarification or elaboration. Though I generally tried to keep the conversation focused on the point of my interest as long as possible, this was often difficult to do, as several women were usually present and their animated participation would send the discussion rapidly switching from one topic to another. Often I would not be able to return to the topic of a particular portion of a conversation until the following day, which would usually be in the presence of a similar but not identical circle of senior women.

Because multiple informants were generally present, I made it a practice to ask

specifically for affirmation or contradiction of particularly interesting bits of information generated in conversation. In such a circumstance I would record the original assertion and the name of its author, along with subtle variations or contradictions from others present, duly noting their names. Though one might assume that social inhibitions would regularly prevent my interlocutors from contradicting assertions made in friendly conversation, I confidently believe that such a tendency was not very strong in most cases because of the general intimacy of these gatherings and the lively self-assurance of the senior Bilani women (Berberized form of the Arabic 'Bīdān', i.e., 'the whites'). However, when gatherings included both Bilani and Harratani women it was clear that Harratani women were somewhat more cautious about volunteering opinions, especially those that might contradict those of the Bilan. This seemed to be true despite, or perhaps because of the intimacy between women whose immediate ancestors were connected by ownership/slavery.

Most of the information that I collected about women came from these informal interviews with senior women, the oldest of whom claimed to be one hundred years old. They told me stories from their lives, as well as the poems and stories they heard from their mothers and aunts. Most of the information about Walata's cultural history came from them. Senior women retained knowledge of Azer, a mixed Mande/Berber language that was gradually replaced by Arabic during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In fact, Azer names are still used for many artifacts of the domestic material culture. Women were also the best sources of information on architecture, clothing, musical instruments, foods, and medicines that existed in the past. They retained information about local events, such as attacks by nomads, climatic crises, and personal and political conflicts. They also transmitted stories about marvelous or even miraculous deeds by local historic figures, and they tended to speak more openly than men about the use of magic.

There are several factors which explain why Walati women are so knowledgeable about local history, especially compared to Walati males. The most important of these factors are women's visiting unions, women's oral literature, and age stratification among men. Bilan women in the nineteenth century practised *purdah*. They rarely left their homes during daylight hours. However, this restriction did not prevent women from socializing. Bilan women regularly organized group day-long visits, called *gayla*.<sup>1</sup> Such an event would normally include between five and ten women, and would be planned several days in advance. On the day of the *gayla* the women would meet in the home of the designated host just before daybreak. Special foods, milk-based beverages, and occasionally even tea would be served throughout the day as the women exchanged stories, recited poetry, and sang songs. The visit would end at sunset and the women would return home, often having already arranged the next gathering. *Gaylas* tended to consist of women of roughly the same age, though a few young women might attend a *gayla* organized by much older women and vice-versa. The relatively relaxed nature of intergenerational relations among women was starkly contrasted by the strict respect or even shame that marked relations among males of different ages.

Walati males of all rank were circumcised in public ceremonies which marked the creation of age-sets, which were quite similar to those found in sub-Saharan societies. When Walati males met in public or private with males from an older age-set they could not offer their hand in greeting, instead they would approach meekly, the older male placing his hand on the younger male's head or shoulder. This shame-like respect even limited social contact between brothers. Hence,

a male's relationships tended to spread horizontally among males of his own age. Relations between males of different social rank but the same age were often easier than relations among men of the same rank but different ages. Females observed none of these age-based social restrictions among themselves. Hence, it was easier for women to transmit cultural information from one generation to another.

*Gaylas* would typically include women from several clans and the typical woman might attend *gaylas* in the course of a year with a hundred to two hundred different women. The female slaves or Harratine of a host were charged with preparing and serving the food and refreshment at their master's *gayla* but were also able to participate when not occupied with preparing food. Beverages were typically prepared in the presence of guests and any woman could recount a humorous story while preparing cultured milk or tea. In fact, the ritual-like process of preparing drinks added to the theater of storytelling. The only males who were generally allowed to attend the *gaylas* were the young boys of the host. Boys became excluded from such gatherings by early adolescence because social access to marriageable women was forbidden.

While the average Bilan woman's potential universe of *gayla* visitors was relatively large, it was nevertheless limited by personal and family rivalries. But these rivalries often separated women from feuding factions of the same clan rather than women of separate clans. Sometimes these feuds among women were reflections of the feuds of their male kin, but this was often not the case. Many adult males, especially those who spent from six to nine months of every year outside Walata, were essentially ignorant of the political relations of their female kin. The reverse, however, was never true. Women in general, and Bilan women in particular, were highly knowledgeable about the intimate details of relationships among males, females, and between the two.

The importance of women's organizations in the preservation of local history can best be

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1 The word 'gayla' is Arabic and in Walata it most generally refers to a siesta period during the hottest part of mid-day. Ordinarily people do not visit each other at this time of day, in fact it would be quite impolite to do so for any reason other than an emergency. Thus, the long visits are most distinguished by the fact that the participants spend this most intimate portion of the day together.

demonstrated by the following example. In the 1860s and 70s Walata experienced a conflict based on political maneuvers between two Walati coalitions and the leadership of a large nomadic confederation called the Meshdouf. The Meshdouf were in the process of seizing control of Walata and its region from the Awlad Daoud, with whom Walata had generally good relations. At this critical time the leadership of the Meshdouf was riven between two factions, as it was for most of the century. The conflict within the Meshdouf offered interesting opportunities for Walatis. The town's established leadership, the Lemhajeb and their close allies supported one faction while rogue elements of the Ahl Baomar and Awlad Yunus supported the opposite faction. This conflict found its way into written documentation generated at the time by male elites of the two Walati coalitions, however the richest source of information survived in the form of unwritten poems and stories which were generated by two particular *gayla*-organizing unions which were established because of the conflict and continued to exist for at least 25 years.

The significant point regarding the Meshdouf conflict is that women, those inside and outside the *gayla* unions, were the primary transmitters of the story of the conflict. Males produced letters and legal opinions which were quickly lost in document-filled trunks. They manipulated the alliances and hostilities that helped produce the conflict and which were reshaped by it. But gradually as those in the conflict died and the shifting alliances moved into the future, knowledge of the story became irrelevant to evolving political relations among men. By contrast, the story of the conflict was embedded in poetry and stories that were preserved by women for their esthetic value. The poems were performed over and over in *gaylas* and in intimate family gatherings. After a couple generations most of the specific knowledge males retained of the conflict was from snippets of poetry they had heard from their grandmothers and great aunts when they were still young enough to frequent the gatherings of women.

Today it is impossible (I think) to reconstruct the intricate political relationships between the women of the two *gayla* unions and to determine the influence they had on the male side of the conflict. But two points are worth making. First, the women's conflict was necessarily distinct from the men's. Intermarriage within the town was so pervasive that every town-wide conflict split clans and often even split nuclear families. No pattern emerges even if one assumes a woman would choose sides based on male kin. Because marriages were short lived and frequent, women might have much closer relationships with their brothers than with their current or former husbands, and daughters might be closer to maternal uncles than fathers. Moreover, the patterns of marriage and female social intercourse suggest that women were probably most influenced by other women—their mothers, milk mothers, sisters, cousins and friends. In any case, marriage patterns, extended family structures, and the style of female social relations all combined to complicate a woman's experience of town conflicts and to distinguish it from a man's. Indeed, not all Bilan women in the town belonged to one of the unions, as many women avoided participation because they had close relatives on both sides of the conflict.

I made cassette recordings of formal works of Hassaniyya oral literature, most of which have not yet been transcribed or translated. This literature, much of which was performed in *gayla* visits, is essentially of two genres—long rhymed poetry and short theatrical stories. All these recordings are of female performers, as this literature is almost entirely produced and transmitted by women. I have noted the information directly from these recordings and use this information with reference to both my notes and the recordings.

While there were some disadvantages to the informal nature of most of my interviews, this informality seemed especially practical to me for three reasons. Firstly, after conducting several interviews with the aid of a French speaking interpreter, I realized that my interpreters tended to alter both my questions

and the informant's responses. The alterations were so gross that they were immediately obvious to me despite my relatively weak skills in Hassaniyya. Secondly, the presence of the interpreter sometimes inhibited the informant's responses because of kin relationships between the informant and my interpreter. And the third and most important reason was that informants outside my adopted extended family lacked comfort and confidence in me because I was so newly arrived, and because my Hassaniyya and general understanding of Walati society was so weak. For these reasons I decided to spend the first six months learning Hassaniyya and the local culture and history before embarking on formal interviews. As it turned out, I waited almost a year before beginning to interview formally. Informal conversations proved themselves to be highly informative, and the longer I stayed the larger my circle of casual friends became.

By the time I began conducting more formal interviews I had already learned most of what I now know about the history of Walata's culture and family relations. Formal interviews with persons I did not know very well were facilitated by the fact that I usually knew at least one member of the individual's family, and that I was already familiar with the contributions of the person's family to the history of Walata. In casual conversation before the interview I might explain that I wanted to get more information about the potential interviewee's great aunt, whom I had heard was a popular Qur'anic teacher, or perhaps a grandfather who was killed in a particularly violent nomadic raid. Indeed, the more formal interviews tended to ignore cultural practices such as cliterodectomies and concubinage, which were not appropriate topics outside of conversations between relative intimates. Instead, my formal interviews tended to center on the history of the informants' own families, which is itself considered somewhat intimate by most Walatis, even when it deals with generic issues. Information from these interviews tended to form elaborate genealogical histories, including snippets of specific information on

many but not all recent ancestors. Such data reveal patterns of intermarriage between families, polygyny, reproduction through women of various status or social origins, and outmigration.

Limitations in the way I learned about Walati history did not solely arise from cultural factors and my status as a foreigner. The extended family with which I lived was of the Mahjubi clan, and when I arrived in Walata in November 1990 the Mahjubis were intimately involved in a very serious political dispute. I was immediately associated with the Mahjubi side of the conflict, simply by virtue of arriving in town as their guest. Unfortunately, I was not able to appreciably diminish this association over the course of the next two years despite my best efforts to gain the trust of the opposing side.

My entanglement in this dispute clearly limited my access to a prominent political faction of the town and therefore negatively affected my research. I believe this was unavoidable. However, the nature of the political divisions created by the dispute mitigated to a significant degree my problems of access. Although the Mahjubis were more or less unanimously situated in one camp, primarily because of the group's small population in Walata, both camps included elements of the main Walati clans. In fact, the two leaders of the competing factions were both from the same extended family which has dominated Walati politics for the last sixty years. Thus, the leader of the opposing camp distanced himself from me, while I was quite close to his paternal cousin, who was the leader of the Mahjubi side of the conflict. Political allegiance in Walata is such that firm supporters of the opposite political group, regardless of age, gender, or status, were generally uncooperative. So I learned about the dominant clan of recent Walati history from only a particular portion of that clan.

The dispute in which I found myself in 1990 was actually only the latest round of a much older conflict that had split today's most powerful clan at the moment it assumed dominance in Walata in 1930. Perhaps it



should not be surprising that this recent conflict is very similar to the conflict that begins my account of the nineteenth century. I have found that although the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have brought enormous economic, political, and social changes to Walata, these changes seem to have not displaced the primacy of the essentially local history of conflicts and associations. Indeed, to most Walatis these local stories are the central events of the last two hundred years. The sedentarization of the regional nomads; the decline of the trans-Saharan trade; colonialism; the rise of market production; independence; desertification—all these phenomena change the scenery and alter the characters, yet do not seem to change the basic plot. In effect, no regional or international process could touch Walata without doing so through the unfolding local histories.

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